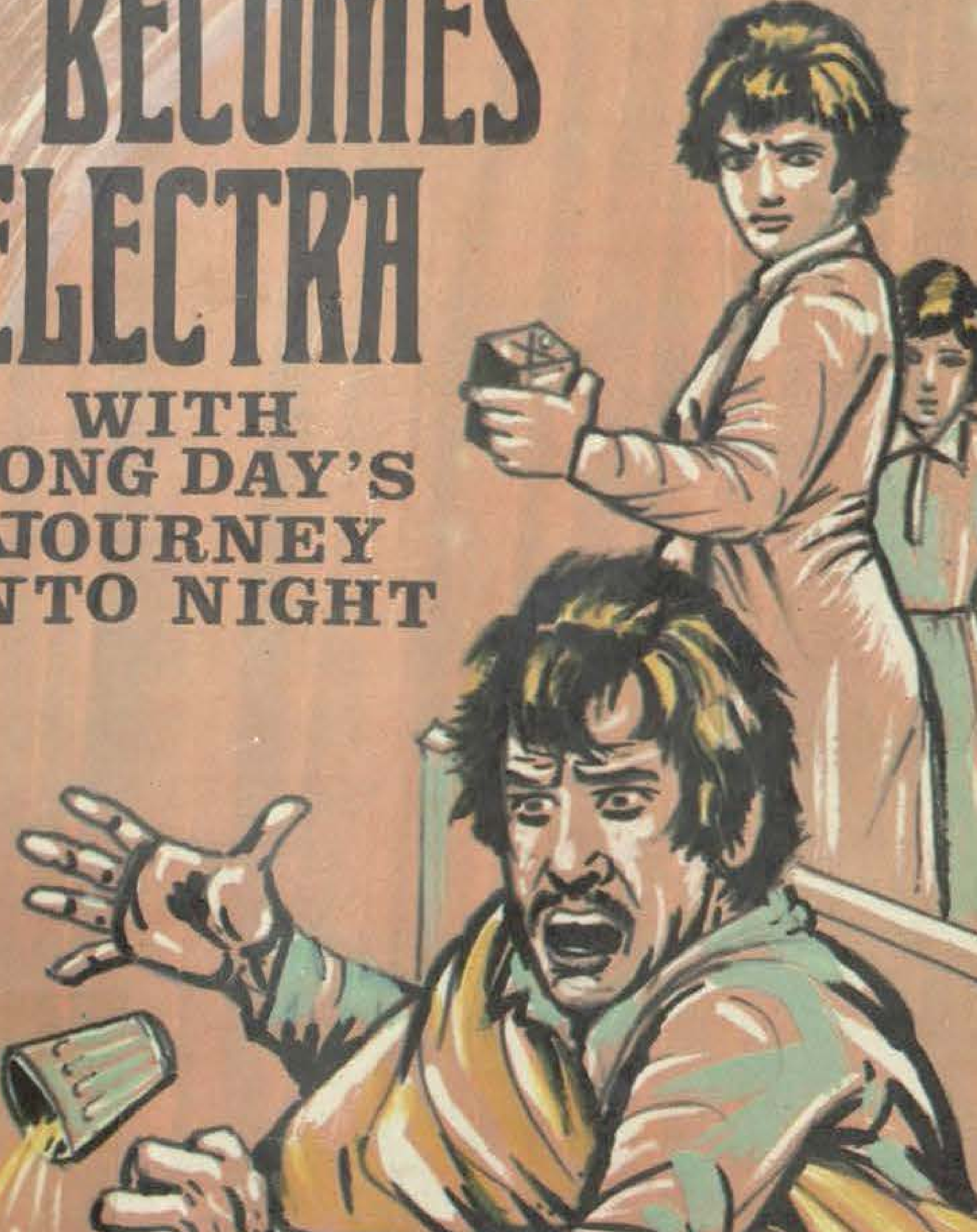
EUGENE O'NEILL

MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA

WITH LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT



Masterpiece
Critical Study

EUGENE O'NEILL

MOURNING BECOME ELECTRA
With
Long Day's Journey Into Night

Salient Features

- Complete Aspects of Eugene O'Neill
- Story in Outline
- Detailed Summary
- Critical Commentry
- Theme
- Characters
- Different Aspects of Mourning Become Electra
- Major and Minor Characters
- Select Literary Criticism
- Critical Questions with Answers

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33. Select Literary Criticism :—

7. The spectacle of characters in *Mourning Becomes Electra* is "not only absorbing but also and at once horrible and cleansing." Does this statement truly reveal the nature of tragedy in the play ? 257

8. Discuss O'Neill's departure in *Mourning Becomes Electra* from the original source of the play.

Or

9. "Although certain important departures are made from the Greek story, the main line of action is made clear at once from the Greek analogue and the main characters possess an authority immediately derived from those in Aeschylus." Comment on the validity of the above statement.

Or

10. "Most conspicuously, the trilogy is O'Neill's Greek tragedy." Comment on the above statement about *Mourning Becomes Electra.*

Or

11. "Aeschylus could take it for granted that his audience knew what the Trojan War was about, as O'Neill had only to suggest his time and place, knowing that he need not explain much about the Civil War or a New England city." Examine the degree and nature of O'Neill's indebtedness (in *Mourning Becomes Electra*) to Aeschylus.

Or

12. "O'Neill soon saw that he could not plan very well his story against a present-day background, the time of the Civil War was just remote enough." Do you think it to be a sound reason for O'Neill's departure from the Greek original ?

Or

13. What difference in emphasis, tone and meaning do you find between O'Neill's play and Aeschylus' *Orestela* ? 260

14. "*Mourning Becomes Electra* is the drama of a soul at mortal grips with the love of self, the deadly poison of the spirit that denies all creation because it would be self-creative, self-sufficient, both creator and creature, man coequal with God." Discuss.

Or

15. "The central theme of *Mourning Becomes Electra* is the evil of love of self and high price one has to pay for it." Is it true assessment of the theme of the play ?

Or

16. Discuss *Mourning Becomes Electra* as an indictment of puritanic love of self.

Or

17. Examine the following comment on the male characters in *Mourning Becomes Electra* :

> Each of the male Mannons must die if the soul is to live.

Or

18. "The redemption from man's self-love can be found only through the death of man himself at the hands of what is itself evil." Does it indicate the real theme of the play ? 266

19. "The title of *Mourning Becomes Electra* suggests the relations of the play to the Greek drama." Discuss.

Or

20. "*Mourning Becomes Electra* follows the pattern of the Greek trilogy in the essentials." Discuss.

Or

21. Examine the influence of the original Greek story of the House of Atreus on *Mourning Becomes Electra.*

Or

22. "Neither Ezra nor Christine Mannon shares the heroic stature of the Greek Agamemnon and Clytemnestra." Do you agree ? 274

23. "Death is the goal of O'Neill's Puritan." Discuss.

24. "In *Mourning Becomes Electra* there is an overwhelming, unrelenting sense of the imminence of death." Discuss.

Or

25. Examine John Henry Raleigh's comment on *Mourning Becomes Electra* that underneath many devices and themes there is the paramountcy of "the ubiquity of death."

Or

26. Bring out the theme of death in *Mourning Becomes Electra.*

Or

27. "Since O'Neill's puritanism does not include a theological dimension, death is an end in itself, not a passage to another world." Elaborate.

Or

28. "In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, death is not merely a thematic image or simply a way of dispatching the personae and cleaning up the stage. It is the Epiphany that concludes the action, the vision to which the plot progresses." Examine.

Or

29. "No one ever reaches a conclusion ; all they know, with any certainty, is that death is surely, inexorably devouring the Mannons, their power, and thier way of life." Discuss.

Or

30. "Death symbols and themes are woven into the play in all kinds of ways." Do you agree ? 277

31. Why does every Mannon in *Mourning Becomes Electra* seek escape from the real world ?

Or

32. "The thematic image of the "Islands" runs through the entire drama and represents a uniquely American belief that a spatial remove is a panacea for all problems." Examine the statement about *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

Or

33. Examine the symbolism of the "Islands" in *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

Or

34. "The Islands in *Mourning Becomes Electra* are not only a symbol ; they are also very real." Discuss.

Or

35. "As a symbol the Islands represent release from puritan guilt, the hope of an escape to love and freedom." Examine with reference to the description of Islands in *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

Or

36. "For Adam, the Islands are a Garden of Eden, where sin is unknown and life simple and sweet." Do you agree ?

Or

37. "In *Mourning Becomes Electra* O'Neill uses the Islands as the surrogate to the hope of a new life." Examine this statement critically.

Or

38. What is so "mysterious and beautiful" about the South Sea Islands in *Mourning Becomes Electra* ? 280

39. "O'Neill's concern with his characters' outward appearance is quite noticeable throughout his work." How far it is true of *Mourning Becomes Electra* ?

Or

40. Comment on the character appearance as an important dramatic device in *Mourning Becomes Electra.*

Or

41. "In *Mourning Becomes Electra* hair symbolizes strength and sexuality and eyes mirror the souls of characters." Discuss.

Or

1

The Life of Eugene O'Neill

Birth and Parentage

Eugene Gladstone O'Neill was born on October 16, 1888, in a Broadway hotel room in New York. His father, James O'Neill, was one of the most renowned actors of American theatre, and his mother, Ella Quinlan, was a strikingly beautiful lady who lived a quiet life. Both James and Ella came from Irish Catholic families that had immigrated to America. But temperamentally they were poles apart. Ella, cultured and educated, leaned towards a mystic view of life, and was reserved, romantic, and innocent. James, on the other hand, had had no formal schooling, but was gregarious, materialistic, charming and universally loved. Their differing temperaments resulted in a destructive marital incompatibility which formed the theme of Eugene O'Neill's several important plays, including *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, *Welded*, and *Long Day's Journey Into Night*.

Early Years

Eugene's first seven years were spent mainly in the larger towns all over the United States—his mother accompanying his father on his road tours in *Monte Cristo* and Repertoire. Actually his mother nursed him in the wings and in dressing rooms. These first seven years of Eugene's life were highly impressionable. If, on the one hand, his tours with his father injected the theatre permanently into his blood, on the other, they gave him a thorough dislike of conventions of the romantic, commercial theatre.

Boarding Schools : Loneliness

The next six years which O'Neill spent at Catholic boarding schools increased his feeling of isolation. In September, 1895, he entered the Mount St. Vincent-on-Hudson boarding school, Riverdale, New York, operated by Sisters of Charity. There he felt lost and bewildered among the strange children and the alien, black-robed women, so terribly unlike his beautiful mother. His days and weeks were filled with the anguish of loneliness and with yearning for the familiar presences that made up his universe. The hurt went deep. He felt that he had been betrayed, cheated and rejected by

those he had trusted most. This sense of exile and loneliness bred in him a fear and distrust of love, which became one of the central problems of his life and one of the central themes in his plays.

Rejection of Catholic Faith

On October 16, 1900, Eugene entered De La Salle Military Institute in Manhattan. This time he lived at home and attended daily classes at the school. De La Salle was a Catholic school operated by the Christian Brothers. Eugene, like a good Catholic boy, fervently prayed for the recovery of his mother and brother from their illnesses, but when nothing came out of it, he knew that he was through with Catholic Schools and Catholicism. His parents could not induce him to accept any further religious training. But his rejection of Catholicism hounded him for the rest of his life. The anguish of this rejection of faith is clearly revealed in *Days Without End*. In his open rebellion and revolt against religion and convention he sought a substitute faith.

Betts Academy

In September, 1902, Eugene entered Betts Academy, a non-sectarian Connecticut boarding school, where he was given a thorough grounding in the classics. He acquired a good knowledge of Latin and French and also did well in Greek and Roman history. From Greek history he developed a taste for Greek drama which became for him the mark of the highest achievement in drama. As a result he modelled several of his plays on the pattern of Greek Tragedy.

Mentorship of Jamie

When only ten years old Eugene had accepted his elder brother Jamie, a suffering, cynical, alcoholic as his mentor and guide. Since then Jamie had been a formative and destructive influence on Eugene, whom he both loved and resented. His letters to Eugene were tinged with sneering comments about life and religion that had a lasting effect on the younger boy. Not only this, Jamie also taught Eugene how to reject his father's values by turning to a forbidden world of drink and whores. He put his kid brother wise to life by brutally placing him, a very young boy, in the hands of hardened prostitutes who taught him quickly—without any glossing of romance or beauty or affection—the crude mechanics of sex. The impact of these experiences on sensitive Eugene was shattering. For him, sex (particularly as represented by a prostitute) became a symbol of the revolt from love—the pure love he had felt for his mother--and of a spiritual violation, a rape.

Love For Reading

O'Neill had a great love for reading since his childhood days. By the time he was 14 he had read authors like Kipling, Anatole France, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Oscar Wilde, Conrad, Jack London,

Victor Hugo, Alexander Dumas, Walter Scott, Byron and Emerson. But his greatest excitement came when he discovered Shaw's *Quintessence of Ibsenism*. He read and reread it during his last year at Betts in 1906. The book came as a revelation to him. He now understood exactly what was wrong with the romantic plays he had grown upon. Vistas of social and intellectual revolt opened before him.

Princeton University

After graduating from the Betts Academy, Eugene entered Princeton as freshman on September 20, 1906. But he soon discovered there that Princeton was excessively tradition bound, self-consciously superior and clannish. He did not find there anything in the nature of intellectual challenge or stimulation. He strongly felt that the people there were not in touch with life or on trail of real things. He frequently indulged in whoring and drinking and once while returning from a drunken spree broke glass insulators on telegraph poles along trolley line from Trenton. He was suspended for two weeks after which he was reinstated. But he did not want to continue and voluntarily left Princeton without completing first year's requirements.

Self-Education

After his exit from Princeton O'Neill was convinced that he could learn more out of College than in. His first step in self-education was into Benjamin R. Tucker's "The Unique Book Shop", on New York's Sixth Avenue. He spent several hours at this book shop, absorbing Tucker's ideas, reading his books, and learning of the other anarchists of the day. Tucker advocated Individual Liberty as the only satisfactory way of life, and argued in favour of "the right of the drunkard, the gambler, the rake and the harlot to live their lives until they shall freely abandon them". Tucker also told O'Neill about Max Stirner, whose philosophy of egoism, which disdained all social and ethical standards, impressed him. But Tucker's most significant contribution to Eugene's education was in introducing him to Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Eugene was enthralled by Nietzsche, and remained so all his life.

Ibsen and Schopenhauer

O'Neill's first job was as secretary in a mail order firm dealing in cheap costume jewelry. Eugene had no interest in such a job and he got a good riddance when the company went bankrupt. He fell out with his father and moved into a studio on Broadway and Sixty-Sixth street, which he shared with two young artists named Edward Keefe and George Bellows. Along with them he led a thoroughly bohemian life. At this time O'Neill saw several plays of Ibsen and was deeply influenced by them. Later he said about Ibsen : "He's deep, all right, and dreadful, like life itself, but he's also intensely human and understandable." Meanwhile O'Neill also discovered for himself the works and philosophy of

Schopenhauer. He responded profoundly to Schopenhauer's cosmic pessimism that explained his own insane follies, which had often seemed to originate in a mysterious force beyond his own individual will. He felt deeply the truth of Schopenhauer's vision of a great life force working itself out pitilessly through the lives of individual men, tossing them about in a fever of living for no end other than life itself, so that life becomes a perpetual suffering endured for a hope that always proves abortive. He was deeply drawn to the vision of man as a creature kept in a perpetual state of senseless striving by the power of the will to live. Schopenhauer's view of individual human life as the expression of a vast mysterious force beyond self coloured his thinking, particularly in plays like *Strange Interlude*.

First Marriage

After being involved in an affair with a pretty, young girl of his own age, Kathleen Jenkins, he was forced to marry her on October 2, 1909, after which he decided he had to do nothing with her. His father was glad to send him on a mining expedition to Honduras. There he faced great hardship and found no gold. He returned from there in April, 1910. One day he found himself signing aboard a Norwegian barque as an ordinary seaman. As Eugene sailed on *Charles Racine*, the sea began to symbolize for him "both a source of life and a final, ecstatic freedom from the burden of life".

In South America

O'Neill arrived in South America with ten dollars, his wages for the sixty-five day voyage. But these wages were gone in one night—spent at a notorious Buenos Aires waterfront saloon called the "Sailors' Opera". In Buenos Aires O'Neill tried his hand at one job after another. First he took a job with the Westinghouse Electric Company as a draftsman. After six weeks he quit and took a job with Swift and Company in the meat-packing centre at La Plata. He was assigned to the warehouse where raw hides were sorted. Soon after the warehouse burned down, leaving him out of job again. He found his next employment with the Singer Sewing Machine Company, back in Buenos Aires. But his job there did not last long and he was fired.

At Jimmy-the-Priest's

From Buenos Aires O'Neill had no place to go but home, and so he signed on as an ordinary seaman on a British tramp steamer, S. S. *Ikalis*, bound for New York by way of Trinidad. O'Neill was not sorry to leave the *Ikalis* when she docked in New York early in June, 1911. There he lodged himself at the Fulton Street rooming house known as Jimmy-the-Priest's. He settled down among the sailors, stevedores, truckers, anarchists, wobblies, prostitutes, telegraphers, printers, and assorted down-and-outers who inhabited

the grisly, vermin-infested three-storey establishment and whom, more than thirty years later, O'Neill recalled as the best friends he ever had. Jimmy-the-Priest's, like New London, attained a permanent significance for O'Neill. He used it in 1920 as the setting for the first act of *Anna Christie* and in 1939 as a background for *The Iceman Cometh*. In addition, much of the first-hand knowledge of whores, gamblers and waterfront characters he displayed in other plays came from the half dozen months he lived at Jimmy's.

Divorce and Attempt to Commit Suicide

On October 11, 1912, the Court granted O'Neill the final divorce decree from Kathleen Jenkins. During the next three months, whenever Eugene was sober—even momentarily, because of lack of funds—things looked so black to him that he would have drunk anything, even varnish diluted with water, to make him forget he was alive. He drank until he could no longer think or feel—and until even drinking wasn't enough to blot out his misery. He began to wonder seriously if, after all, it wouldn't be better for him to kill himself. And so he went out and bought veronal tablets, tossed down what he estimated to be a lethal dose and went to sleep in his room. A couple of his friends found him there, guessed his condition, and took him to Bellevue Hospital in an ambulance. He was declared there out of danger. Seven years after this suicide attempt, in 1919, O'Neill wrote a one-act play *Exorcism* embodying his experience of the suicide attempt.

Zola and Dostoevsky

In August, 1912, when Eugene was nearly twenty-four, he became a reporter on the New London *Telegraph*. At this time he read Maupassant and Zola, getting more ammunition for a war against middle class values. He was profoundly impressed by Zola's vision of the large biological, economic, and hereditary forces that sweep individuals to destruction. By the end of November O'Neill was declared to be suffering from tuberculosis. He was admitted to the Gaylord Farm, where he found himself abruptly transformed from a man of action into a man of inaction. Finding himself no longer able to make a physical response of violence to everything in life that tormented him, he turned his fury inward—and made the miraculous discovery that he could be a creator instead of a destroyer. At this crucial moment in his life he was tremendously influenced by two works he read : Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* and Strindberg's recently translated play, *The Dance of Death*. O'Neill found that in writing he could escape from a hostile world. He could belong. He also found that writing was his life, that without writing as the focal point of his existence he had no life.

Baker's Drama Workshop

O'Neill was discharged from the Gaylord Farm as an arrested case and he left the sanatorium on June 3, 1913. In September

Eugene moved across Pequot Avenue to live and board with a family named Rippin. During his stay with the Rippin family from September 1913, to March 1914, O'Neill completed at least six one-act plays and a full length one. On learning that he had been admitted to Baker's 'English 47' class, O'Neill, late in September 1914, took a train for Cambridge– and to his goal of becoming "an artist or nothing". Though O'Neill was chosen for Baker's advanced class next year, he did not return to Cambridge. Instead, in the fall of 1915, he headed for New York.

At Hell Hole

In New York, Eugene O'Neill moved into a room at 38 Washington Square in Greenwich Village. Greenwich Village was a good place for a drunken spree. In the years just before the United States entered the war, the Village was aflame with radical ideas, violent soul-searching and monumental egotism. Before long, O'Neill knew all the Village saloons. But the most alluring one for O'Neill was Wallace's Golden Swan bar, popularly known as the "Hell Hole". The Hell Hole habitue who made the most searing impression on O'Neill was an incredible man named Terry Carlin.

Provincetown

In the spring of 1916 O'Neill headed for Provincetown, where he was finally to find recognition for his talent. The summer of 1916 saw the prodaction of *Bound East for Cardiff* at the Wharf Theatre. Till the end of April 1917, O'Neill had turned out four more plays—*Ile*, *The Moon of the Caribbees*, *The Long Voyage Home*, and *In the Zone*. By the end of May, 1917, O'Neill was in New London, staying with his family.

Second Marriage : Awards and Honours

O'Neill married for the second time, a girl named Agnes Boulton, on April 12, 1918. On February 3, 1920, the first production of an O'Neill play opened on Broadway with *Beyond the Horizon*. On June 3, 1920, O'Neill was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for this play. On August 10, 1920, O'Neill's father, James O'Neill, died. Within the next three years he completed seven long plays and took a hand in the production of five of these, in addition to the two—*Gold* and *The Straw*—that had been completed earlier. On February 28, 1922, his mother died. On May 21, 1922, the Pulitzer Prize was announced for *Anna Christie*. In February 1923, O'Neill was elected to National Institute of Arts and Letters and was awarded gold medal for drama. On November 8, 1923, O'Neill's elder brother Jamie died.

Litt. D. From Yale

O'Neill's *All God's Chillun Got Wings* opened in the Provincetown Theatre on May 15, 1924. On November 11, 1924,

Desire Under the Elms opened at the Greenwich Village Theatre. O'Neill received an honorary Litt. D. from Yale on June 23, 1926. The newly elevated Doctor of Letters arrived at his rented cabin at the edge of one of the Belgrade Lakes in Maine on July 1, 1926. Carlotta Monterey, the charming actress, was the house guest of Elizabeth Marbury, a neighbour of O'Neill, that summer. Both of them met and O'Neill was attracted to her.

Third Marriage

Marco Millions opened on January 9, 1928, at the Guild Theatre to lukewarm reception. Sometime before the opening of *Strange Interlude* on January 3', 1928, O'Neill had made up his mind to marry Carlotta. In February that year he went abroad secretly with Carlotta. They lived in England and France and also went on an eastern voyage. On July 2, 1929, Agnes Boulton was granted divorce on grounds of desertion. O'Neill and Carlotta were married on July 22, 1929, in Paris. On May 17, 1931, they were back to New York.

At the Height of His Career

O'Neill's most ambitious play, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, opened on October 26, 1931. The reviews of this play were extraordinarily enthusiastic. The production of this play was, in a sense, the climax of O'Neill's career. He was to complete six more plays, but only three of them were produced on Broadway in his life time. And of the three, only the light-hearted and a typical *Ah, Wilderness*! was an unqualified critical and popular success. The production of *Days Without End* on January 8, 1934, marked the beginning of a period of public decline for O'Neill in the United States. By the end of 1934 he had determinedly retreated into the past. Only periodically he visited New York.

Nobel Prize For Literature

On November 12, 1936, O'Neill was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech he declared :

> ...I feel so deeply that it is not only my work which is being honoured but the work of all my colleagues in America—that the Nobel Prize is a symbol of the coming of age of the American theatre.

Days of Decline and Anguish

The year 1937 had not begun auspiciously for O'Neill. From the beginning of this year to the end of his life in 1953 he was more or less regularly in the hands of doctors and at the mercy of drugs and medical regimens. In the summer of 1939 O'Neill had begun writing *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, which was to prove O'Neill's masterpiece. He was a spiritually, mentally, and physically

tormented man during the two years it took him to write this play. By the end of 1940 O'Neill had finished the play, except for some final polishing.

Shocks

O'Neill, who reached his fifty-fifth birthday in 1943 had been writing steadily for thirty years. At this point in his life he was hoarding an unproduced backlog of four plays, as well as drafts of eight Cycle Plays. In addition he had notebooks filled with play ideas and outlines destined never to be written. As he laboured over *A Moon For the Misbegotten* in the early part of 1943, O'Neill found it increasingly difficult to control the purely mechanical process of writing. When he was finishing the play in the spring of that year, his already taunt nerves received another onslaught. On June 17, 1943, he read the news that his daughter Oona (from his second wife, Agnes Boulton), recently turned eighteen, had married Charlie Chaplin, who was then fifty four. O'Neill was so infuriated that he disinherited her, along with Shane (her brother), and all their issue.

Last Days

The last O'Neill play to be produced on Broadway during his life time opened on October 9, 1946. The play was *The Iceman Cometh*. It had a mixed reception. At the end of July 1948, Carlotta found another new house for O'Neill in Marblehead Neck, about twenty five miles from Boston. O'Neill, just past his sixtieth birthday, moved into his new house in October 1948. After that he shifted to Shelton hotel.

Disease and Death

On September 25, 1950, O'Neill was shocked to learn that Eugene Jr. had committed suicide in Woodstock, New Jersey. The causes of suicide were probably disappointment in love and his failure as a classics teacher at Yale and Princeton. On November 24, 1953, O'Neill became critically ill. He had shortness of breath, a cough, and a high fever. The fever raged for three days. Once during this time, O'Neill gave expression to his life-long feeling of homelessness and alienation: "Born in a hotel room—and God damn it - died in a hotel room!" He died on November 27, 1953.

2

The Works of Eugene O'Neill

A Colourful Spectrum

O'Neill's creative career spanned the crucial period between the two World Wars. The period of three decades from 1914 to 1945 was charged with intense dramatic potential which O'Neill used to good advantage by writing some highly stirring plays. His works reveal a varied and colourful thematic and structural spectrum. They touch upon a large variety of themes and show theatrical experimentations with virtually all sorts of devices and patterns. Even in size and shape O'Neill's plays range from very short plays to the plays of epic dimensions. O'Neill's works thus show a restless and creative spirit at work. This is so because O'Neill never felt at home in the capitalist-materialist culture of grab-and-loot in America. He always aspired to a life of creative fulfilment which he was denied in a country that in the name of individual freedom and equality only perpetuated a philosophy of bondage, elitism and an all-pervasive jungle-law carrying the fancy name of *laissez-faire*. Brief synopses of each one of O'Neill's plays are given below to savour the rich variety of his plays.

(1) A Wife For a Life

This short play is concerned with two characters—"The Older Man" and Jack, "The Younger Man". They have been good pals ever since that day in the Transvaal five years ago when Jack hauled the Older Man out of the river, saved his life and their friendship began. They work together in a mining area, looking for gold. The Old Man has been on the lookout for a Young Man who has been a lover of his wife. The Old Man receives a telegram addressed to Jack and opens it. It simply reads : "I am waiting, Come." As it turns out, the Young Man is the same for whom the Old Man has been searching. The telegram was from the Old Man's wife. The Old Man is in a dilemma. Finally he decides : "Greater love hath no man than this, that he giveth his wife for his friend."

(2) Thirst

In this short play, there are just three characters : a Gentleman, a Dancer, and a West Indian mulatto Sailor, and the scene passes on the life raft of a wrecked steamer in mid-ocean. The play opens with these lines : "My God ! My God ! This silence is driving me mad !" The episode shows three sorry remnants of humanity dying of thirst. The sailor sits apart crooning a "monotonous Negro song". The Gentleman and the Dancer are convinced that he has a supply of drinking water hidden somewhere, and the Woman approaches him and offers her necklace for a drink, but the sailor persists in denying that he has water. The Woman then offers herself, but the stolid Negro is unmoved. When shortly after, she dies, the Negro begins to show an interest in life, sharpens his knife and, glancing toward the body, addresses the gentleman : "We shall eat. We shall drink", whereupon the Gentleman pushes the Woman's body into the sea. The Negro, mad with rage, plunges his knife into the other's back, is himself caught in the desperate embrace of the wounded man, and the two totter off the edge of the raft. "The sun glares down like a great angry eye of God...On the raft the diamond necklace lies glittering in the blazing sunshine."

(3) The Web

This short play opens with the exclamation—"Gawd ! What a night !" This is a melodramatic piece about a prostitute and her protector. The scene is a "squalid bedroom on the top floor of a rooming house on the lower East Side, New York". The woman has a baby, which annoys Steve, and when he knocks her down another man comes to the rescue in the nick of time. The bully tells her that if she leaves or "holds out" on him he will send her to jail and take the child away from her. Caught in the web ! The newcomer, a fugitive from justice, is attracted by the woman and gives her money to go away with ; but Steve, who has been hiding nearby, re-enters, kills the other man and "plants" the revolver in order to implicate the woman when the police arrive, which they don't fail to do the very next moment. The woman is taken away, while the baby cries "Maammaaa". One of the plainclothes men takes the infant and speaks to it : "Mama's gone now. I'm your mama now."

(4) Warnings

Warnings is in two scenes. The first shows us a wireless operator in his home. Knapp works aboard a transatlantic liner, and has just learned that he may become stone-deaf at any moment ; but for the sake of his family he doesn't dare report the facts to his employers. The second scene is in Knapp's cabin aboard ship in mid-ocean. The steamer is sinking and the operator is desperately

signalling for help, but he can get no answer. "Oh, my God! It's come!" he cries to the Captain. "I can't hear anything. It's happened just as the doctor said it might...Oh, I should have told you, sir, before we started—but we're so poor, and I..." etc. He then shoots himself.

(5) Fog

The scene in this short play is the "life-boat of a passenger-steamer drifting helplessly off the Grand Banks of Newfoundland. A dense fog lies heavily upon the still sea". The characters are a Poet, a Man of Business, a Polish Peasant Woman, a Dead Child, Sailors, and an Officer. Together in the boat are the Poet, the Business Man, the Woman, and her Dead Child. They drift up to the edge of an iceberg, where they wait for help. They hear a steamer whistle, but the Poet, to save the Steamer from running into the iceberg, prevents the Business Man from calling. We see by this time that the play is not conceived as a realistic transcript from life: the Poet is a symbolic embodiment of idealism, and the Business Man an abstract figure suggesting materialism. For the moment it looks as though all were lost; then the fog lifts and the boat approaches. The Sailors have been guided to them by the voice of the Child. Meantime the Peasant Woman has died. The scene is quite dramatic. The Officer asks: "But the child is all right, of course?", and the Poet replies: "The child has been dead twenty-four hours. He died at dawn yesterday..."

(6) Recklessness

It is a swift-moving drama of revenge. A husband returns home and learns that his wife is having an affair with the chauffeur; after getting the facts from a jealous maid, he sends the chauffeur out, knowing that the steering-gear of the car is out of order and we are left to shudder at the knowledge that he rides to certain death. He does, and when his body is brought in, the woman kills herself.

(7) Bound East For Cardiff

The scene of this play is in the seamen's forecastle on a foggy night when the steamer *Glencairn* is half way between New York and Cardiff. Yank is lying in his bunk, mortally injured by a fall when he was groping for a ladder and missed his footing, falling to the deck below. The ship's captain has been unable to do anything for him. Yank knows instinctively he is dying and a great fear has come over him—the fear of being alone in the forecastle with the fog whistle blowing above him and the sound of snoring men about him. It is the big blustering Driscoll he must have with him—Driscoll with whom he has fought time and again and made up and whom he loves with the one overpowering human affection left to

him. But it is the sea, after all, that has brought him injury, the sea that has possessed him and in death itself Yank hungers for the land—a secret he has never dared to confess even to Driscoll, not knowing that Driscoll himself has been hiding the same dreams. Then the possession of the sea sweeps over him again, and his mind wanders in the adventures of the sailor's life—the Argentine, Buenos Aires and La Plata, Singapore, Sydney and Cape Town where he had killed a man in fight. As the last sharp pain shoots through him, he suddenly sees before him "a pretty lady dressed in black". Driscoll sinks on his knees beside the dead man, his lips moving in some half remembered prayer.

(8) Servitude

This play debates the role of women in marriage. David Roylston, a playwright, has written eloquently of the need for women to assert their individuality so that they may become something more than married chattel. Strongly influenced by Roylston's Ibsenesque morality, Ethel Frazer has left her husband and sought the playwright, asking for further guidance. To teach Roylston to have the courage of his morality, Mrs. Frazer tries to make him see that his own wife has been forced to serve him as a kind of bondswoman. Mrs. Roylston, Patience's monument, will have none of such teaching. She is content to sit in her husband's shadow, type his plays, and lend substance to his mask. Roylston is brought to see his indebtedness to his wife. "Happiness", Mrs. Frazer tells him, "is servitude." "Of course, it is !" he replies enthusiastically. "Servitude in love, love in servitude !" The insight is very nearly unavailing, since Mr. Frazer arrives with gun in hand, prepared to kill Roylston, his wife's suspected lover. Quickly won over to the prevailing acceptance of things as they are, he and his wife go happily off, leaving the Roylstons united anew in firm understanding.

(9) Abortion

The scene of this play is an unnamed eastern University of America. Jack Townsend, the star baseball player, has seduced a poor girl from the "wrong" side of town. Her pregnancy has necessitated an abortion, and she has died following the operation. This news is conveyed to Jack on the evening of his greatest triumph on the baseball field. Faced by the tubercular brother of the dead girl, Jack admits guilt. While the undergraduates chant his praises beneath his dormitory window, he expiates his guilt by suicide.

(10) The Sniper

This short play tells of a Belgian peasant whose son and wife have been killed by German soldiers. In desperation he defies orders and begins shooting Prussian soldiers as they march through his village. He is soon captured and shot.

(11) Before Breakfast

In this short play, Mrs. Rowland lives with her husband Alfred in a dingy flat. She prepares breakfast, and talks to Alfred as he is making his toilet in the next room, complaining of her struggle to make both ends meet, while he, "the millionaire Rowland's only son, the Harvard graduate, the poet, the catch of the town", goes off drinking and gallivanting. She taunts him for having married her and speaks in no uncertain terms of the girl he had really loved. Her wail swells to a climax, and subsides when she has no more to say. Silence. She waits for an answer—then the drip-drip of something in the bedroom. Alfred has cut his throat with a razor.

(12) The Movie Man

The play posits that two representatives of "The Earth Motion Picture Company" go to Mexico and suborn a comic Mexican general to stage real battles for their cameras in return for ammunition and liquor.

(13) Ile

This play presents Annie Keeney as a fragile woman who has gone with her husband to sea despite his protest that a whaling ship is no place for a woman to live. She has dreamed of her husband as a Viking but has learned the truth of her romantic illusion when she is locked in an icebound sea for an interminable winter surrounded by mutinous sailors and isolated from her kind and her comforts. Captain Keeney's harshness is bred in him by the qualities of the ship which he must master. He can do no less than what he came for : to fill his ship with oil. Her plea that they return moves him, but his acquiescence is momentary, for at the moment he gives in, the ice to the north breaks, whales appear and he goes forward after the oil. Mrs. Keeney escapes into madness.

(14) In the Zone

This short play enacts an episode that unfolds aboard the tramp steamer *Glencairn*. The year is 1915, and the time midnight, just after the ship has entered the submarine zone. In the forecastle the sailors are in a state of high nervous tension. One of them, Smitty, who does not belong with the crew, but has sought the sea as refuge from his troubles on the land, behaves suspiciously, and this leads the others to believe he is a German spy. They start to take a box from his trunk which they fear may be filled with explosives. They cautiously dump it into a pail of water and open it. Smitty comes in quietly and discovers what his shipmates are about, but before he can do anything they seize him and tie him

to his bunk. In the box they discover only a bundle of letters from the girl Smitty had been engaged to, and in reading them they learn what has happened : she had thrown him over because he drank, and he had gone to sea in desperation. As the story unfolds, the men are ashamed, and at the end they release Smitty in silence. From one of the letters a dried flower flutters and falls to the floor.

(15) The Long Voyage Home

The scene of this play is the bar of a low dive on the London waterfront. The crew of the *Glencairn* have just been paid off. Olson the Swede, with two years' savings in his pocket, wisely refuses to drink. He has been planning for a long time to go home and settle on a farm, but every time he had got his pay he squandered it. At last it looks as though he were about to realize his dream. But he is tricked by a scheming couple into taking a soft drink—which is drugged. They rob him, carry him out, and put him aboard a ship bound on a two years' voyage round the Horn. His comrades come back and find him gone. They are told he has disappeared with one of the girls, and Driscoll grins : "Who'd think Ollie'd be such a divil wid the wimmin ? 'Tis lucky he's sober or she'd have him stripped to his last ha'penny."

(16) The Moon of the Caribbees

As the curtain rises and the main deck of the *Glencairn* is revealed, "A melancholy Negro chant, faint and far off, drifts, crooning, over the water." The men sit on deck in small groups, waiting for native women to come aboard and bring them rum, and holding inaudible conversations. Gradually the chant penetrates their talk and reduces them to silence. Driscoll's chanty leads to the coming of the women. The noise level grows as rum is passed, fights begin and end and the crew moves from the deck into the forecastle. As the door is shut, the brief turbulence of sound ends, and the chant reasserts itself as an accompaniment to Smitty's reflections on his past. The revelry in the forecastle grows, the men burst out onto the deck and a dance tune is introduced, again drowning the chant. A fight begins, Paddy is knifed, yet, when the brawling subsides, the chant is heard again, placid as the moon and unresponsive as the sea that has cradled the sorrow, brutality and revelry on the ship.

(17) The Rope

This short play is a study in hatred. The central character is Abraham Bentley, a miser, a hard, militant-christian New Englander. When his son, Luke, returns, he proves to be a worthless, loud-mouthed braggart. Abraham receives him with

joy, but is so overcome with emotion that he loses the power of rational speech. He can only indicate that he wants the boy to hang himself in the noose. The boy turns violently on his father and plots with his brother-in-law to torture the old man in order to force him to reveal the whereabouts of a thousand dollars in gold. They leave the barn, and as the play ends, Mary, Abraham's feeble-minded granddaughter, swings on the noose. It pulls away from the beam, and the bag of money falls to the floor. The child takes the coins and, playing "Skip-Rock" with the gold, throws them into the sea.

(18) The Dreamy Kid

This short play tells of a murderer pursued by the police, who returns home to see his dying mother and gets caught.

(19) Beyond the Horizon

Robert Mayo is the victim of his dreams. As he is about to start on a long sea-voyage with his uncle, he believes he is desperately in love with the girl who is engaged to his brother Andrew; she impulsively throws Andrew over and accepts Robert, while Andrew sails in his place. Before long Ruth discovers that the marriage was a mistake and is sure that she is still in love with Andrew. Three years pass and Robert, ill and disillusioned, with only his child to comfort him, fails miserably in his efforts to make a go of the farm. Andrew comes back for a short time, only to bring unhappiness both to Ruth and to Robert: the woman realizes that he no longer loves her, and Robert, who had hoped to get from his brother at least a breath of the romance he himself had longed for, finds Andrew a commonplace and unimaginative materialist. From this point onward, Robert is the central figure. We are shown the mental and physical degeneration of a man who cannot live without illusions. Indeed, each character in the play is obsessed by his desire for what he can never have—for what lies beyond the horizon.

(20) Where the Cross is Made

In this short play, Isaiah waits for his ship, the *Mary Allen*, to return with a treasure he and his crew had discovered and buried years before when they were cast away on a South Pacific island. Nightly, he stalks a poop deck built on the roof of his house, watching for the ship's riding lights. The play makes clear that the treasure is worthless and that the ship has been wrecked. Yet his obsessed conviction that it will return is so great that it infects his son Nat with unwilling belief. Both father and son are caught by meaningless hope that drives both mad. At the climax, the ghosts of the drowned sailors enter the room, and both father and son

are convinced that the *Mary Allen* has come home. Isaiah dies of a heart attack, and Nat takes his place on the captain's walk, watching the sea.

(21) **Chris Christopherson**

Anna comes to her father's barge, cool, poised, ambitious. Night school, shorthand, college courses, a career are what she contemplates. Her father persuaded her to take one trip on the barge, and she finds in the quiet, foggy journey a kind of peace, and senses in the sea a power which to her is strange but not wholly alien. Nothing disturbs her calm of spirit. Even when the barge breaks loose from its tow and drifts into the steamer lanes, she cannot think that the sea that has proved so unexpectedly welcoming will lead to her destruction. Her belief is justified, for although the barge is rammed and sunk by the freighter *Londonderry*, Anna and Chris are rescued. Almost at once, Anna finds herself attracted by the handsome second mate, Paul Andersen. Chris, in a rage that Anna has fallen in love with a sailor, attempts to murder Andersen. He fails, and the play ends with Chris returning to the sea as bosun on the *Londonderry*, and with Paul, fired by Anna's ambition, determined to study for promotion so that, exercising a captain's privilege, he may sail the sea with his Viking bride.

(22) **The Straw**

This is a love story about an Irish girl who meets a young newspaperman at a tuberculosis sanatorium. After a few months Stephen leaves, completely cured, ready to make his way as a writer, while Eileen, whose well-being depends wholly upon Stephen, remains. She has only him to live for, and when he returns to see her on—no longer in love—she loses courage. In his masculine way Stephen makes a brave pretense, trying to give Eileen a "straw" of hope.

(23) **Exorcism**

The short play tells of a young man who finds life hard to bear in the slums where he is forced to exist. He takes poison, but two drunken friends call a doctor, who arrives just in time to save him.

(24) **Gold**

Captain Bartlett, cast ashore on a desert island with some of his crew, is a party to the murder of two of his men. He had discovered what he believes to be treasure, and crazed by thirst and a prey to suspicion, he allows the crime to be committed. But already corrupted by his lust for gold, he tries to evade his

moral responsibilities. The Captain and his companions are rescued, and the next act finds them, six months later, at his home on the California coast. Bartlett has fitted out another ship and is about to sail off once more in quest of the treasure. His wife Sarah, ill and fearing that all is not well, opposes the venture. His son Nat, who has gradually learned the facts, is seized with the madness that is consuming his father. He wants to sail with the Captain. As if to strengthen his own faith in his quest, the Captain forces Sarah ill as she is, to christen the ship. The next day his two companions conspire to sail without him and make off with the gold themselves. But they need a captain. Young Drew, engaged to Bartlett's daughter Sue, is persuaded to go with them in Bartlett's interest, and when the Captain is at home they sail off, while the old man stands on the hill cursing them. The last act takes place a year later. The schooner has been lost at sea, and the Captain, now wholly in the grip of hallucinations, is only the shadow of his old self. He is pursued by the fantoms of his victims and the ineradicable belief that his schooner is on the point of returning laden with gold. His passion for the treasure has meantime killed his wife and driven Nat mad. At the very end he produces a sample of the "gold" he has kept by him in secret, but Nat in a lucid interval realizes that it is only junk. The Captain tears up the map showing where the treasure is buried, and dies.

(25) Anna Christie

This play tells of the regeneration of Anna under the influence of the sea and the love of a man. It is not until long after her arrival at Jimmy the Priest's that her father learns she has been living for a time as a prostitute. But it is made clear—it is at least asserted and reiterated—that she has preserved a virginal soul, and when she confesses to Burke that she never really loved any man before she met him, we are willing to believe her—at the time. Living happily on her father's barge, she is ready for a "pure" love when her hero emerges out of the blackness of the fog. Their passion develops rapidly up to the point where Anna confesses : then the man reacts, instinctively rebelling against the idea of marrying the kind of woman he had been used to hiring on occasion. But after getting drunk he returns to her, and the two are united.

(26) The Emperor Jones

The play is composed of a very few simple elements—a hunted man, a series of sharply defined pictures, and a monotonous rhythmical drumbeat. It is a magnificent presentment of panic fear in the breast of a half-civilized Negro.

(27) Diff'rent

Emma Crosby learns that Caleb Williams, a sea captain to whom she is engaged, has had an affair with a native woman in the South Sea Islands. She has always believed him sexually pure, "diff'rent" from other men, and the shock of the discovery causes her to break off the engagement. The second act is in Emma's home thirty years later. Emma is an embittered victim of sex-suppression. Caleb's nephew, Benny, an American doughboy who fought in World War I, recently returned from France, is deliberately 'stringing' the old maid in order to get money out of her. The pitiful Emma is deceived into believing that the youth is going to marry her. But her disillusionment is swift and cruel. Benny tells her that if his uncle buys him off, he will promise not to carry out his threat of marrying. Caleb, who remained faithful to Emma by never marrying, hangs himself while Emma also gets ready to put an end to herself.

(28) The First Man

The play presents the struggle of a high-minded scientist to live up to his ideals. He is about to set forth on an expedition in search of the earliest traces of man, and he has with the utmost difficulty arranged to have his wife accompany him on his five years' quest. Two years before they had lost their children under tragic circumstances and made up their minds not to have any more. As the play opens the Jaysons are faced with a problem that is to end in tragedy: Martha is going to have a baby. Curt is thunderstruck; his career and life-work are threatened, and the worst of it is that Martha seems happy. She tells Curt: "Yes, you love me. But who am I? You don't know." The third act is concerned with the birth of Martha's child. Curt's attitude has not changed: he hates the child that has ruined his work, and Martha has read that hatred in his eyes. She dies, after giving birth to a boy. The hypocritical relatives of the Jaysons attempt to make a scandal by fixing the paternity of the child upon Bigelow, friend and confidant of Curt and his wife. But after some initial hesitation, Curt declares his acceptance of the child, whom he will teach "to know and love a big, free life".

(29) The Hairy Ape

The ape of the play is a neanderthal stoker, controlling the furnace gang on his ship with animalistic power and the confidence that is born of total security in his place. Thought does not trouble him until he is made aware of the contempt held for his bestiality by members of another world of which he is only dimly aware. Then thought comes, and he is driven from his security to a frenzied run through New York City, seeking again the primitive

sense of "belonging" that he has lost. His effort is disastrous, and he dies in the cage of the great ape in the Central Park Zoo.

(30) The Fountain

Juan Ponce de Leon's journey to foreign lands is characterized by a materialistic desire for possession, but he remains blind to the mystery of the exotic worlds about him. He is introduced as a man of war, speaking war-mongering slogans, and bent on an expedition of plunder with Columbus, he lives with "disciplined ability and confident self-mastery". Only when his love for Beatriz leads him to seek the source of life in the eternal spring does he change. In the final scene Juan discovers himself reborn in his nephew who loves the young Beatriz, daughter of Juan's former mistress. He dies crying: "One must accept, absorb, give back, become oneself a symbol." As he dies, his reincarnated self sings the song of the fountain.

(31) Welded

A sensitive man (Michael Cape) and his equally sensitive wife are tortured on the one hand by their love for each other, and on the other by an almost psychopathic passion for self-torture. Michael Cape has the combination of a thinker, dreamer and sensualist in his personality, while his wife Eleanor is a passionate, self-disciplined woman. Their life together is a rhythmical ebb and flow of love and strife. Michael is jealous of Eleanor's supposed affection for John, while she is jealous of his work. The situation tightens as each seems determined to kill his love for the other. In the second act, Eleanor arrives at John's house and throws herself into his arms, but she is unable to carry out her intentions. Michael has gone to a prostitute, but he too finds it impossible to carry out his intention. In the final act, Eleanor and Michael smile with a queer understanding. They act for the moment like two persons of different races, deeply in love but separated by a barrier of language. They realize that they are "welded", indissolubly linked together.

(32) The Ancient Mariner

It is a dramatised version of Coleridge's well-known poem, and proved to be a great failure. It was never published.

(33) All God's Chillun Got Wings

The opening scenes show in a seemingly casual way the unselfconscious friendship between black and white youngsters. One of these, an earnest young Negro, Jim, has ambitions; he strives to pass his law examinations and makes heroic efforts to overcome what he feels are his racial limitations. He marries Ella, a white girl, and

for a time the two are happy ; but before long they are beset by the problems which arise in America whenever a black and a white overstep the line which the white man has drawn between his own world and that of the 'inferior' Negro. The girl goes crazy and tries to kill her husband, who embodies for her all the innate and unreasoning fears which are her traditional and conventional heritages as a white woman. But she recovers, and asks forgiveness.

(34) Desire Under the Elms

Ephraim Cabot, a New England farmer, has just married his third wife, Abbie Putnam, an attractive woman of thirty-five, half his own age. She accepts him in order to provide a home for herself. She finds awaiting her young Eben, Ephraim's thirty-two-year-old son by his second wife. Believing that the farm belongs rightfully to him, Eben looks upon his new stepmother as a designing and dangerous interloper, and he hates her with all the venom of a true son of Ephraim Cabot. Abbie is both clever and seductive, and to keep the farm in her possession she tells her husband that she believes she could conceive a child by him. The old man is delighted and promises that if she should so bless him he will make over his property to the new heir. Abbie then proceeds cold-bloodedly to seduce Eben, but during the process she falls desperately in love with him, as he does with her. A son is born to them, and Ephraim believes it his own. Abbie, for all her cleverness, has aroused in her heart a passion that wrecks all her plans : the lies necessary for carrying out her plot can no longer be concealed, and Eben tells everything to his father. Ephraim then destroys the last vestige of Eben's illusion by telling him what was, not long since, the literal truth : that Abbie has pretended to love him only in order to make sure of the property. The young man, in a fury of rage and disappointment, decides to leave home at once, to Abbie's utter despair. The irony of the situation is not clear to her ; she is so deeply attached to Eben that she cannot convince him that though in the beginning she did make love to him for an ulterior purpose, she is now completely mastered by her passion. She frantically tells him that she loves him for his own sake, but he will not listen. She must now prove at any cost that she is sincere. She therefore strangles the child. Eben is at last convinced of her love for him, but is so horrified at her act that he runs off at once and tells the police. The last scene finds the lovers once more in each other's arms. Eben confesses that he is an accomplice and he is ready to pay the penalty with Abbie. They are taken off by the sheriff and his men, happy and exultant.

(35) Marco Millions

The play is a romantic satire on Occidental hard-headedness set against a colourful background of medieval Oriental civilization.

In ten scenes Marco Polo is shown pursuing his career from boyhood to early middle age, and finally to Success. He begins as a nice young man and ends up a Babbitt, minus Babbitt's idealism. The beauty and romance, the serenity and wisdom of an age-old culture, mean nothing to him. The loveliness of a way of life so different from what he has known, and what he desires, is utterly wasted on him. His sojourn in the land of Kublai Kaan is merely an opportunity for amassing a fortune.

(36) The Great God Brown

In this play O'Neill has sought to exhibit, in a vibrant lyrical style, man's aspirations; it is a dramatic paean to man's struggle to identify himself with nature. The tone throughout is mystically ecstatic. Man's way is seen here winding through the vale of tragedy, but it emerges triumphant.

(37) Lazarus Laughed

This play is an exposition of a philosophy of life and death. Here we are concerned more with the idea than with the characters. Lazarus has risen from the tomb and after Jesus departed he began to laugh softly like a man in love with God, walking abroad from that time on, preaching his doctrine that "Death is the fear between". Fortified by his faith, Lazarus fears nothing as he tests its validity by setting himself against those who fear life in fearing death. He even attempts to convert the Emperor Tiberius. The materialistic philosophy of the Roman cannot resist the ecstatic Lazarus, and even though Tiberius orders him killed, the prophet of eternal life is triumphant. At the end Caligula the scoffer, the degenerate heir of Tiberius, is almost won over to the new faith, and as the curtain falls he cries out "Fool! Madman! Forgive me, Lazarus!"

(38) Strange Interlude

This play carries four characters through their chief emotional crises during twenty-seven years or so. Nina Leeds, daughter of a college professor, loses her fiance shortly after he goes to war to be an aviator. Her puritanical father has prevented the consummation of their union, which precipitates her decision to leave home. At first she becomes a nurse, then she seeks other outlets for her more or less imperfectly adjusted desires and aspirations. As she enters the main action of the play she has already begun to take on the appearance and characteristics of woman—with a capital 'W'; she is mother, wife, mistress, adultress, materialist, idealist. Into her life are woven strands from the lives of many men: of Gordon (a romantic memory and an ideal); of the patient mother-ridden Charles Marsden;

of Sam, her husband; of Edmund Darrell, her lover; and later of her Gordon. For this woman no one man is enough. This epic creature, endowed with an inordinate thirst for life, takes on the proportions of a superwoman. With dreams that can never quite be fulfilled, held in check by inhibitions, forced onward by appetites, she is the incarnation of vitality, a creature that is driven to meddle in the lives of others in order that her own life may be filled to overflowing. At last she is defeated by time and by that very spirit of youth that urged her on to rebel when she was young. The boy Gordon and the girl he is determined to marry leave her, even as she had left her helpless father.

(39) Dynamo

It is the tragedy of a young man who loses faith in the old God of dogma, imagines that he recovers it in the sleek image of an electric dynamo and soon finds himself worshipping it with the same calvinistic vehemence, superstition and madness. Having violated the vow of chastity made in pious devotion to the new electric god, he casts himself into the dynamo in a graphic final scene.

(40) Mourning Becomes Electra

It is a retelling of the tragic tale of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, Orestes and Electra; an almost contemporary rearrangement of the first two parts of the Aeschylean trilogy, with a curiously modern interpretation of the theme of *The Furies* or *The Eumenides*. But it is not an exemplification of the Greek religious problem of fate, for O'Neill has reconceived the old doctrine of Nemesis in terms of the more or less modern biological and psychological doctrine of cause and effect: here no mortal has offended a divinity; it is an American New Englander, a puritan, who has transgressed the moral code of his time and people, and the son of his victim turns upon the living representatives of his family for revenge. Captain Brant becomes the helpless instrument of his own passion, and instead of seeing through to the end of his bitter mission, he succumbs to the superior strength of his mistress's daughter, Lavinia, who then drives her mother to suicide, her brother Orin first going mad, and then killing himself. For a moment it seems as though Lavinia might find peace, but here again the heritage of hate is too heavy for her, since Orin in dying has made it impossible for his sister to marry the man she once loved. With that moral courage and single-mindedness that have sustained her throughout, she sees that, death is too easy a solution for her, and with a gesture of perfect beauty and tragic serenity she turns her back on the world and walks into the house, never to come out again.

(41) Ah, Wilderness !

Young Richard Miller, an introspective youth "going on seventeen, just out of high school", is something of a family problem. "Poetry's his red meat nowadays...love poetry—and socialism too, I suspect, from some dire declarations he's made." And sex as well, and the state of the world in general. He's fond of the equally immature Muriel McComber, whose father reacts in true bourgeois fashion when he discovers that the youth has been sending her love poems by Swinburne, and other "vile" and inflammatory missives. When the girl writes him a letter putting an end to their friendship, the lad becomes a full-blown pessimist. By way of proving to himself the genuineness of his disillusion he walks out of the house and in a low dive meets a prostitute, buys drinks for her and for himself, and discovers that he can go no further with her down the road to ruin ; timidity and disgust, a certain self-respect and a chivalrous consideration for Muriel, all keep him "pure". But he does make his appearance before his assembled family in a shocking state of drunkenness. When, a little later, he sees Muriel again and learns that her letter had been dictated by Papa and that she is still fond of him, he tells her frankly of his misdeeds, and the two are reconciled.

(42) Days Without End

In this play O'Neill is still seeking an answer to man's quest for spiritual certainty. The critical implications of the whole argument reveal a mind alive to the limitations and the values of the past, a mind high-strung and intense, keyed to new ventures and further explorations.

(43) A Touch of the Poet

The play is set in a gloomy tavern near Boston in 1828, and it has some bearing on the assimilation of European ideas in the business-like democracy of America. There are in the play a hot-blooded Irish father, a submissive wife, and a scornful, rebellious child. The father is a braggart and—a tyrant who fancies himself a gentleman and a soldier who won signal honours on the battlefield from the Duke of Wellington. Everyone else knows that he is a drunken, meddlesome, lazy fraud. Certainly, his daughter does. She is in love with the son of a rich Yankee tradesman who is ill in a bedroom in the inn kept by her father. Her father regards the Yankees as beneath him. He is astonished to find that the Yankees regard him and his daughter as trash.

(44) More Stately Mansions

This play is a sequel to *A Touch of the Poet* and its action takes over from the point at which the earlier play had ended. Sara

Melody has got herself married to Simon Harford and the central action of the new play revolves round the fierce battle of possessiveness between Sara and Deborah for the soul of Simon. The over-all title of the Cycle, "A Tale of Possessors Self-dispossessed" is most appropriately applicable to the play's central theme.

(45) The Iceman Cometh

The whiskey-ridden derelicts who drag their broken carcasses through Harry Hope's bar are men whose only lives are illusions—'pipe dreams'. When the play opens they are happily living together in a spirit of human rancour, broken, tired and drunken but buoyed up by romantic illusions about themselves. What shatters their stupor is the arrival of an old comrade who has reformed. He has found peace at last, he says. He does not need whiskey any more, he says, because he has purged himself of illusions and knows the full truth of himself. Instead of making them happy, however, his reform movement destroys their decaying contentment. Without illusions, they find themselves standing alone and terrified. They cannot face the hollowness of themselves without the opium of illusions. But they are released in the last act by the awful discovery that their mentor has freed himself from illusions by committing a crime that will take him to the electric chair. He is free from illusions because he has resigned from life and is already dead in spirit. Whereupon, the derelicts drink up again and happily relapse into the stupor of the bottle.

(46) Long Day's Journey Into Night

In this play there are a father and mother and two sons. The father, a noted actor, is a drunk and a miser. The mother is a sweet dope fiend. The elder brother is a cynical sot and the younger one is a sick and troubled boy. One by one, the four people in this family try gropingly to explain how and why they became the way they are. All have been caught in destiny they cannot alter. As they tell of themselves, each in a long monologue, these people become larger than their own small lives; they become humanity, looking for something but not knowing exactly what it is looking for.

(47) Hughie

The play depicts Night and the City, and is one of the most powerful brief evocations of the loneliness, boredom, and despair of the bottom-dog in the modern city in the language. All rhythms are mechanical and repetitious, each harsh sound indicating the Alexandrine crawl of time, dragging its snaky length slowly along.

(48) A Moon for the Misbegotten

James Tyrone Jr., is dissipated, all but destroyed. He been indulging himself in cruel jokes, and picking out the weakness

in people and sneering at them, but at last he reveals himself to Josie Hogan, the strapping daughter of a Connecticut tenant farmer. During the final two years of his mother's life Tyrone was her loyal and affectionate support. He stayed on the wagon for two years, not even consuming a glass of beer. But just before his mother died she saw her son drunk again, unable to face losing her. "She closed her eyes so she couldn't see, and was glad to die." And after that, when Tyrone brought his mother's body East, "to be buried beside the Old Man", he picked up a "50 buck a night blonde" on the funeral train. He had some mad idea she could make him forget—what was in the baggage car ahead. Josie downs her momentary feeling of revulsion. She loves Tyrone, and she has been presenting a false face to the world herself. Josie has been posing as a wanton. She has made herself the scandal of the neighbourhood. But profane, ungainly Josie is an innocent, a softly feminine spirit trapped in a gross body. After his confession Tyrone falls asleep in her arms, chastely, on the shabby porch of the farmhouse. Josie knows that she cannot save Tyrone. "It's a fine end to all my scheming", she says, with a self-derisive smile, "to sit here with the dead hugged to my breast, and the silly mug of the moon grinning down, enjoying the joke !"

3

Development of O'Neill's Dramatic Technique Or Growth of O'Neill's Dramatic Art

Ascending Curve

The chart of O'Neill's growth as a dramatic artist can be drawn in an ascending curve. During his dramatic career, extending from his early one-act plays to his late masterpieces, he experimented with a variety of dramatic forms and modes. There is hardly any dramatic form or device which he did not assay in his attempts to shadow forth the sickness of modern man in his plays. The wide variety of techniques employed by O'Neill reflects the playwright's deep-seated spiritual restlessness. As John Gassner says :

> In all his major work O'Neill traced the course of a modern dramatist in search of an aesthetic and spiritual centre. It is not certain that he found it often, if ever, but the labour involved in the effort was usually impressive and sometimes notably rewarding. His plays embodied the ideas and conflicts of the first half of the twentieth century, assimilated its advances in dramatic art and theatrical technique, and expressed its uneasy aspirations towards tragic insights and dramatic vision. His impressiveness as a dramatist is ultimately, in fact, the result of his determined effort to trace a thread of meaning in the universe virtually emptied of meaning by a century of scientific and sociological thought. He did not, it is true, find any comforting assurances in the world, but he had the integrity to acknowledge his failure and the persistence to dramatize it with much penetration into human nature. O'Neill's experiments were not undertaken to suit the whims of a volatile trifler or the

calculations of a theatrical opportunist bent on following the latest fashion ; they manifest, rather, a unity of high purpose rarely exhibited by modern playwrights.

The Styles of Theatre

In O'Neill's work there is a veritable *summa* of the modern theatre's aspirations and achievements as well as its more or less inevitable limitations and failures. O'Neill attracted attention with two styles of theatre rather than one, being equally adept in the styles of realism and expressionism, and with two radically disproportionate types of drama, since he was equally effective in one-act plays and in cyclopean dramas twice the normal length of modern plays. His search for expressive form, in his case a combination of private compulsions about life and dramatic art, led him to undertake numerous experiments with symbolic figures, masks, interior monologues, split personalities, choruses, scenic effects, rhythms, and schematizations. It is largely this multifarious engagement with the possibilities of dramatic art, combined with an endeavour to apply them to significant as well as very personally felt subject matter, that made O'Neill a playwright of international importance.

Rambling Experiments

There is a section of O'Neill critics, however, that thinks that O'Neill's rambling experiments reflect his inadequacy and deficiency as a dramatic artist. Jordan Y. Miller is one of such critics. He writes :

> Consistency in style was never a part of O'Neill's strength. Critics were always seeking the proper niche for his permanent mounting, but they were continually unable to find it. With the early sea plays, including *Anna Christie* and *Beyond the Horizon*, they fashioned for him a pedestal of 'stark realism' that soon melted in the steaming jungle of *The Emperor Jones* and the stock-hole of *The Hairy Ape* ; it was replaced by expressionism, in turn moulded into naturalism, and subsequently nicked and scarred with romantic and classical symbolism, all hastily patched from time to time with mysticism. Masks, half-houses, thirteen acts, and spoken thoughts brought playgoers and critics through a labyrinth of stage effects. None of these, in writing or production, ever solidified or developed into a specific 'O'Neill style'. Nevertheless, this very unpredictability in itself became a style, forcing critic and audience to play a continual game of guessing what he would employ next.

Search for the Right Medium

A group of other critics saw O'Neill's more extreme experiments in dramatic technique as unfortunate aberrations, and viewed with pity the prospect of a man who could write such powerful 'theatre' as *Anna Christie* and *Desire Under the Elms*, dissipating his energies pursuing some illusory Theatre of Tomorrow in *The Fountain* and *Lazarus Laughed*. And when, in the last plays, he apparently returned to the essentially realistic form of his early work, it was looked on by many as a return to sanity. But O'Neill was never one to go backwards ; and the fact that many of his experimental plays failed to win the critical acceptance of the earlier, more conventional, works, would never in itself have led him to revert to a form he felt he had out-grown. As Robert F. Whitman puts it :

> He was always exploring, always hoping, to find a medium of communication that would satisfy his needs both as a dramatist and as a man. The search led him into strange ways, and down dead ends ; but the diversity and violence of both his techniques and his subject matter tend to hide some of the unifying threads which bind together all his work.

Spiritual Quest

O'Neill's plays are, indeed, a continuous record of his spiritual quest. Each play is a new attempt to come to grips with the same old problem, to "dig at the roots of the sickness of today as I feel it —the death of the old God and failure of science and materialism to give any satisfactory new one for the surviving primitive religious instinct to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort its fears of death with." The search led him into many and varied manners of speech : realism, expressionism, naturalism, symbolism, fantasy, poetry, alone and in various combinations, as well as experiments with devices from older dramatic traditions. But behind the apparent diversity was a single impulse : to find an idiom in which to express the human tragedy. And whatever other characteristics O'Neill may have possessed, or lacked, he had a firm grasp of one essential element of tragedy—the eternal conflict between Man's aspirations and some intransigent, ineluctable quality in life which circumscribes and limits him, and frustrates the realization of those dreams which seem to make life worth living.

Early Poetic Realism

O'Neill's early plays reveal a natural synthesis of both the naturalistic and the poetic strivings of the modern theatre. He combined realism of characterization with a sensitive regard for the romantic longings of characters, a naturalist's concern for environmental detail with a metaphysical flight from the particular to

the general, and plodding realistic prose with a poetic flair for imagery, atmosphere, and scenic imagination, it could be said of him that he was one of the most poetic of modern dramatists. In these early plays the conflict between human aspirations, whether "immortal longings" or romantic self-delusion, and the forces which prevent their realization is suggested as much by the setting as by the action itself. In *Bound East for Cardiff* it is in the fog which surrounds the dying Yank, in *Moon of the Caribbees* in the distance between Smitty and his surroundings, and in *Beyond the Horizon* it is symbolized by the dark ring of hills which hems in the world of the farm, and the petty demands and frustrations that sap the life of Robert Mayo, and shut out the beauty and wonder of the sunset and the sea and freedom which lie beyond.

One-Act Plays

O'Neill's one-act plays are short 'slice-of-life' dramas dealing with the miseries, delusions, and obsessions of men adrift in the world. In *Bound East for Cardiff* Yank is lost, and he knows it, but there is something more than pathos in the way he looks back over an aimless life, trying to find some kind of sense to it. Yank is not exceptionally brave or humble or frightened – he is a little of all three, a 'little' man, broken by life and cast aside, without knowing where he is or why. But at the end of the play, when the fog clears, there is also the suggestion that with death came an answer which gave meaning to existence. But a quite different note is caught in the voice of Smitty, in *Moon of the Caribbees*. Baffled though he may have been, Yank did not complain ; but throughout the speeches of Smitty there is a whine of self-pity that stands in sharp contrast to the 'impelling', eternal forces shadowed forth in the peace of the sea, the moon, and the mournful, primitive chant of the natives. The only actions in which he engages are negative, in rejecting the advances of a native girl, or in drowning his memories in alcohol, the most degrading and self-defeating gesture of romantic *weltschmerz*. Smitty is in a fog of the own making. The beauty and sadness and power of life are there, if he could see and respond. But it is too late, in his frustration by life he has been blinded, turned in upon himself, cut off from what is vital and real. *Ile* is especially representative of his early naturalistic—symbolic style with its mordant treatment of a New England sea captain's obsessive pride in his ability to hunt whales for their "ile" (that is, oil) which drives his lonely wife mad. This little play exemplified O'Neill's taste for tragic irony, his characteristic concern with destructive obsessiveness that resembles the *hubris* of classical tragedy, and his fascination with the sea as a mystery and a seduction, and as a symbol of the malignity of fate.

The Power of Realism

Finding the one-act form no more suitable to his purposes, O'Neill turned his attention to longer plays. In an interview

published in the *New York Herald Tribune* (March 16, 1924), he said :

> I am no longer interested in the one-act play. It is an unsatisfactory form -cannot go far enough. The one-act play, however, is a fine vehicle for something poetical, for something spiritual in feeling that cannot be carried through a long play.

He made his first significant attempt in the creation of full-length drama in *Beyond the Horizon*, a saturnine drama of fate and frustration. In this piece of grim realism, O'Neill provided a symbolic setting. Commenting on the deliberate structural design of the play, O'Neill said in a magazine interview :

> In *Beyond the Horizon* there are three acts of two scenes each. One scene is out of doors, showing the horizon, suggesting the man's desire and dream. The other is indoors, the horizon, gone, suggesting what has come between him and his dream. In that way I tried to get rhythm, the alternation of longing and of loss.

The Straw is in the same realistic tradition as *Beyond the Horizon* but its symbols, if they deserve the name, are much less overt. The sanatorium, in which most of the action takes place, with its suggestions of hopelessness and decay, is analogous to the world enclosed by the hills. In *Anna Christie*, the sea, with the sinister shroud of fog in which it hides its malignant purposes, suggests all the awful and mysterious forces of nature which thwart man and his hopes. Throughout the play Chris Christopherson, Anna's father, blames the sea for all that has gone wrong in his life, and at the climax of the action when his failure as a father has become painfully evident, he knows where the fault lies : "It's dat old devil sea, do this to me ! It's her dirty tricks !" The play ends on much the same note, with Chris muttering : "Fog, fog, fog, all bloody time. You can't see vhere you vas going, no. Only dat ole davil, sea—she knows !" Other plays of this early realistic period include *Diff'rent*, *Gold*, and *The First Man*.

The Magic of Expressionism

O'Neill switched over to expressionism with his powerful play, *The Emperor Jones*. This is a frankly experimental play, and while O'Neill's exploration of expressionistic technique can probably be attributed to several factors, one of the most important is certainly that it permitted him to explore inner conflicts with greater flexibility and clarity. The essential realism of the earlier plays allowed for the use of symbolism ; but, such 'inanimate actors' as the sea and the fog, or visual symbols in the setting, such

as the dark ring of hills, too much throw the emphasis on a struggle between the individual and some element in life outside himself. The 'visions' in *The Emperor Jones*, which are neither hallucinations nor projections of Jones's thoughts, reveal the inner springs of his nature as they come in conflict with his assumed, outward character. There are in the play several dramatic devices, almost inanimate actors, which are external to Jones and which do not pertain directly to his nature. But the pulsating rhythm of the native drums, which dominates the action, rapidly becomes a tangible projection of Jones's rising panic—a fact that has led some commentators to see the play simply as a study in the effect of fear on a half-civilized Negro. There is the brooding, mysterious Great Forest in which Jones loses himself—to find himself. It is not just a place where something happens to Jones; it is part of what happens to him, a primeval, elemental force, which literally and figuratively strips him of the superfices of civilization. This is not a play about fear; panic is simply the "acid test" which reduces Jones to his essential nature as Man. Nor is Jones's race important; it is simply that, in the Negro, man's journey from savagery to 'civilization' has been tremendously foreshortened. The play is, in essence, the story of "the failure of science and materialism"—the values implicit in "de white quality's" society—"to give any satisfactory new God for the surviving primitive religious instinct to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort its fears of death with."

The Hairy Ape

The Hairy Ape came as a direct descendant of *The Emperor Jones*. O'Neill said about this play:

> The bell rings for stokers to go on duty...they all stand up, come to attention, then go out in a lockstep file...it is only symbolic of the regimentation of men who are the slaves of machinery. In a larger sense, it applies to all of us, because we are all more or less slaves of convention, or of discipline, or of a rigid formula of some sort. The whole play is expressionistic. The coal shovelling, for instance. Stokers do not really shovel coal that way. But it is done...to contr.bute to the rhythm—a powerful factor in making anything expressive.

Among other expressionistic devices employed by the playwright in *The Hairy Ape* are—the scene on Fifth Avenue when Yank, the hairy ape, comes face to face with a little parade of wooden-faced church-goers who walk like automata and prattle of giving a "Hundred Percent American Bazaar" as a contribution to the solution of discontent among the lower classes; and the scene on Blackwell's Island with the endless rows of cells and the argot of the prisoners floating out

of the darkness. O'Neill continued his expressionistic method in *All God's Chillun Got Wings*.

Mysticism

Mysticism became O'Neill's next target in his dramatic experimentation. In *The Fountain*, there is an element of fantasy in the visions of the fountain, and that symbol lies at the heart of the play. Ponce de Leon wanders in a futile world where wealth and military reputation and power become tawdry and empty, but where the absence of other values leaves him cynical and disillusioned. A desperate hope that love will give life meaning sends him off looking for the Fountain of Youth. Lying half-dead at the edge of a small pool in Florida, he 'finds' it in a vision, and in the song of the fountain lies the essence of his 'discovery'. In this vision of life and death, growth and decay, aspiration and failure as integral parts of the eternal cycles of nature, where all things must pass away to give place to and nourish the new, Ponce de Leon finds his "belonging". Much the same point could be made about *Lazarus Laughed*, another play which asserts the ultimate unity of man with nature and the triumph of life over death: "Believe in the healthy god called Man in you !...What if you are a man and men are despicable ? Men are also unimportant ! Men pass ! Like rain into the sea ! The sea remains ! Man remains ! Man slowly arises from the past of the race of men that was his tomb of death ! For Man death is not ! Man...*is* !"

Tragic Realism

After this, O'Neill reverted to his favourite style of writing—that of tragic realism—in *Desire Under the Elms*, though this time flavoured with Freudianism. *Desire Under the Elms*, is essentially a realistic play employing incidental symbols. There are, for instance, the two elms brooding over the house like Nemesis. It seems apparent that these are intended to suggest the spirit of Eben's mother, once filled with a love of life and beauty, but which had been beaten down and destroyed by Ephraim's materialistic possessiveness, and which only finds fulfilment with the consummation of her son's love for Abbie. But the inner conflicts of the characters are not represented by any special devices. They are, rather, implicit in the duality of each character's attitudes towards the others. This duality is resolved, at tragic cost, in the case of Eben and Abbie ; for Ephraim, it never is.

Symbolism of Masks

The masks of *The Great God Brown* represent a much more drastic experimental device for suggesting a similar internal conflict, although in this case it is not a question of one impulse triumphing

over others, but of two antithetical impulses distorting and perverting each other, and destroying the individual in the process. O'Neill himself threw light on the forces which constitute the play's central tension : "Dion Anthony—Dionysus and St. Anthony—the creative pagan acceptance of life, fighting eternal war with the masochistic, life-denying spirit of Christianity as represented by St. Anthony—the whole struggle resulting in this modern day in mutual exhaustion—creative joy in life for life's sake frustrated, rendered abortive, distorted by morality from Pan into Satan, into a Mephistopheles mocking himself in order to feel alive ; Christianity, once heroic in martyrs for its intense faith now pleading weakly for intense belief in any thing, even Godhead itself." O'Neill saw in mask intense dramatic possibilities. Regarding the value and use of masks he wrote : "I hold more and more surely to the conviction that the use of masks will be discovered eventually to be the freest solution of the modern dramatist's problem as to how—with the greatest possible dramatic clarity and economy of means—he can express those profound hidden conflicts of the mind which the probings of psychology continue to disclose to us." On another occasion, he gave the following dogma for the new masked drama :

> One's outer life passes in a solitude haunted by the masks of others ; one's inner life passes in a solitude haunted by the masks of oneself.

The Dramatic Value of Masks

O'Neill thought that the use of masks could add a new dimension to his plays. So he wrote :

> In *The Emperor Jones*, all the figures in Jones' flight through the forest should be masked. Masks would dramatically stress their phantasmal quality, as contrasted with the unmasked Jones, intensify the supernatural menace of the tom tom, give the play a more complete and vivid expression.
>
> In *The Hairy Ape* a much more extensive use of masks would be of the greatest value in emphasizing the theme of the play. From the opening of the fourth scene, where Yank begins to think, he enters into a masked world ; even the familiar faces of his mates in the forecastle have become strange and alien. They should be masked, and the faces of everyone he encounters thereafter, including the symbolic gorilla's.
>
> In *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, all save the seven leading characters should be masked ; for all the secondary figures are part and parcel of the Expressionistic background of the play, a world at first indifferent, then cruelly hostile, against which the tragedy of Jim Harris is outlined.

> In *The Great God Brown* I would now make masks symbolize more definitely the abstract theme of the play instead of, as in the old production, stressing the more superficial meaning that people wear masks before other people and are mistaken by them for their masks.
>
> In *Marco Millions* all the people of the East should be masked—Kublai, the Princess Kukachin, all of them! For anyone who has been in the East, or who has read Eastern philosophy, the reason for this is obvious. It is an exact dramatic expression of West confronted by East. Moreover, it is the only possible way to project this contrast truthfully in the theatre, for Western actors cannot convey the Eastern character realistically, and their only chance to suggest it convincingly is with the help of masks.

Interior Monologue

O'Neill attacked the problem of how to present the inner conflict dramatically from another direction in *Strange Interlude.* The drama of the Elizabethans, with its asides and soliloquies, had a tremendous advantage over the modern realistic tradition when it comes to representing the "inner" thoughts and conflicts of characters. O'Neill, dedicated to exploring any possible "language" which would permit him to speak through the theatre, felt he could adopt these devices to his own uses and the modern idiom While *Strange Interlude* is in other respects a conventional realistic play, the free use of asides gives the dramatist a flexibility largely lacking in drama tied to externals. By this device O'Neill can show the 'inner' response of a character to a speech or situation immediately and directly. Nor, as in the case of the masks, is the difference between the private and the public speech the distinction between a character's "real" thoughts and some front he puts up to the world. Sometimes, as was true of the masks, the distance between the overt speech and the aside suggests the tensions and conflicts working in the individual. *Dynamo* was another play in which O'Neill used the technique of 'interior monologue'.

Unreal Realism

The general framework of the *Oresteia,* with its brooding atmosphere of self-destruction, represents the most important experimental device used by O'Neill in *Mourning Becomes Electra.* But while he used none of the more obvious devices such as masks or soliloquies, he characterized the play as "unreal realism". This quality is given the play by the fact that, while he does not *use* masks, he suggests them. The Mannon homestead is described as having a "mask-like" quality, and each of the characters that has come under its influence is described in the stage directions as

having a "life-like" mask. The malevolent spell of the Mannons drives all vitality and "reality" inwards upon itself, leaving only the appearance of life—until the inner demands break through the shell with all the violence of long repression. O'Neill himself said that "this mask concept is a dramatic arresting visual symbol of the separateness, the fated isolation of this family."

Split Selves

The central contrivance of *Days Without End* is the introduction of the two conflicting impulses of a single individual in the form of two separate characters, the man and a visible "alter-ego"—man's split personality made flesh. John, the hero of the play, is by nature sensitive, loving, artistic, and possesses a faith in life and in God. Disillusioned in both by the death of his mother—as so often in O'Neill, a symbol of 'oneness' with life's eternal forces—he gradually builds up a defence against life in the form of an 'alter-ego'. Ironically named 'Loving' (John's last name), this 'other self' is callous, cynical, convinced that love is merely lust, that there is 'nothing' beyond life, and that death is the only reasonable escape from it.

Final Masterpieces

In technique, O'Neill's final masterpieces, *The Iceman Cometh*, *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, *A Touch of the Poet* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, represent a return to the relatively pure realism of his earliest plays wedded to an organic symbolism. One of the most striking qualities possessed by all of these plays is the really impressive quantity of alcohol consumed in each of them. It actually represents the technique which serves the same dramatic function as the more mechanical devices served in the earlier plays. Liquor in these plays serves a double function : it permits the dramatist to show the contrast between a man sober with his defences up, and drunk, when his subconscious drives become overt and allows the rapid juxtaposition of contradictory moods and impulses once a person is drunk. It is a device which O'Neill uses for much the same purposes as the more radical innovations, to reveal the conflicts which tear his characters apart and frustrate their potentialities as complete human beings, without appearing arbitrary or mechanical. These last plays mark O'Neill's final achievement as a dramatic artist of great power and beauty.

4

Ideas in O'Neill's Plays
Or
O'Neill's Quest for Meaning
Or
O'Neill's Philosophic Explorations
Or
O'Neill's Search for Faith in Life

His Ideas

There is little in O'Neill criticism to indicate that we have yet recognized the ideas behind O'Neill's plays—the ideas that today make him a living force in drama. We have concentrated too much on the sense of doom and futility that pervades O'Neill's works. Undeniably this negative aspect is there. The man who was always 'a little in love with death' was assuredly not an optimist when he dealt with life. Yet a reading of O'Neill's plays indicates that he is not basically a deterministic writer but rather that he has been attempting to find a philosophy that would reconcile a rationalistic view of the universe with man's need for something beyond rationalism—for a sense of the infinite beyond the finite.

Sickness of Today

Early in his career, O'Neill recognized this basic necessity, when he wrote in an essay that "the playwright today must dig at the roots of the sickness of today as he feels it—the death of the old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfying new one for the surviving primitive religious instinct to find a meaning for life in." In the attempt to find that meaning and to state it in dramatic terms, O'Neill has temporarily embraced and then discarded many modern substitutes for religion in the terms of modern psychology. Essentially he has been a mystic who used the trappings of realism, but a mystic uneasily aware that with the advent of scientific determinism came the need for a new symbolism.

Scientific Literary Convention

For a new day in man's thought, a new and fresh power was needed. An instinctive, convinced belief in mythological gods and heroes was past; even the moral order no longer carried a vital power. Instead, that power was to be found in the scientific laws which were the true, if inanimate, rulers of the universe. Writers could no longer accept the myths of yesterday, as Herman Melville earlier had recognized when he wrote that "great geniuses are a part of their times; they themselves are the times and possess a corresponding colouring." So for *Moby Dick* Melville used a scientific and natural symbolism; he took for a springboard into his exploration of the unknowable soul not an outworn mythology but the sea and a man's search for an actual and a symbolic white whale. Nature became the tragic force, and Moby Dick the '*deus ex mechina*'. O'Neill's great master, Henrik Ibsen, made heredity a tragic force in *Ghosts*; however, unjust it might be, it led as surely to irrevocable doom as ever the moral order had. These and many other writers created powerful literary convention out of the scientific thought of the time.

Struggle With Fate

O'Neill also has followed these modern conventions. In his first important play, *The Moon of the Caribbees*, he set man against nature, with the spirit of the sea intended to be the hero, and the man Smitty reduced to silhouetted gestures of self pity. Smitty's sentimental posings, set against the revealing moods of the sea's eternal truth, reveal that he is out of harmony with nature and therefore no longer attuned to beauty. Only the noble savage, or in our time the natural man, can attain this harmony. O'Neill stated this theme explicitly when he tried to explain the meaning of a difficult and to many people a confusing play: the protagonist of *The Hairy Ape* is a "symbol of man, who has lost his old harmony with nature, the harmony which he used to have as an animal and has not acquired in a spiritual way....The public saw just the stoker, not the symbol, and the symbol makes the play either important or just another play.... The subject here is the same ancient one that always was and always will be the one subject for drama, and that is man and his struggle for his own fate. The struggle used to be with the gods, but is now with himself, his own past, his attempt 'to belong'."

Quest For Peace

O'Neill temporarily abandoned this immediate symbol, but throughout the plays the ultimate longing and the ultimate symbol remain the same: man's desire to find a satisfactory spiritual

peace, a place "to belong" not only in this world but in relation to the universe. The quest was in part at least a personal one. Much later he was to write of himself that "I will always be a stranger who never feels at home...who can never belong."

Man Against Nature

For dramatic purposes, however, he turned back to the theme of man's struggle against nature ; out of it, in fact, he wrote one of his greatest plays *Ile*. Here a tight, just, hard-fisted New England sea captain who failed for the first time to secure his quota of whale oil is faced with mutiny, and with the prospect of a wife slowly going insane from loneliness and fear ; but when the ice breaks and the whales spout, the captain turns inevitably to the chase. The background is deliberately meagre. All the overtones, the true background, are in the struggle shadowed forth rather than expressed between man and his ancient enemy, nature. As in all great plays there are two conflicts : the internal struggle in Captain Keeney between pride and compassion ; the external struggle between a captain and his crew, a husband and his wife, a man and the universe. Because he is above all else the primitive man, the proud hunter, Captain Keeney makes his decision ; and relentlessly, with nature as inexorable as ever were the Greek Gods, tragedy results.

Search For Immortality

The play was satisfying, but to O'Neill the philosophy behind it was not. Man's spirit had to be reckoned with, as well as man's mind. Always the spirit seeks an assurance of immortality. If a rationalistic and mechanistic philosophy denies and to the rational mind proves that it cannot be found through religion, that the assurance can no longer be achieved through faith, then it must be sought elsewhere. In his own search, O'Neill felt temporarily under the sway of the idea that a man attains immortality through his descendants. This is the underlying motif of *The Fountain*. In a programme note, O'Neill told the audience that "the idea of writing *The Fountain* came on finally from my interest in the recurrence in folklore of the beautiful legend of a healing spring of eternal youth." So Ponce de Leon searches fruitlessly for this spring which will wash away the years and give him an earthly immortality ; at last, when he has given up hope, he finds a vicarious immortality in the youth of his nephew: "One must accept, absorb, give back, become oneself a symbol."

Symbol of Life

This is the clearest affirmation that O'Neill's philosophy at that time could admit. The fountain was a symbol of life, tossing its little drops, its human beings, high in the air. They had myriad

shapes and colours : some were caught in the light, others dropped dully back, and a few burst into an incandescent miniature rainbow. It did not greatly matter : more drops must be propagated that more drops may be tossed into the air, and absorbed back again into the whole.

Creation and Continuance

Yet there is something more. According to this belief, the creative power, the strongest power in nature, would perform the age-long functions of mythic religion. For the man this concept was not finally satisfying ; for the dramatist it proved exceedingly fruitful. It is out of this theme of creation and continuance that he wrote two of his famous plays, *The Great God Brown* and *Mourning Becomes Electra.* Even when he parallels, and deliberately suggests cross-comparis on with the ancient Greek legend of Electra,—O'Neill endows his characters with psychological complications that we recognize by such modern terms as repressions, frustrations and fixations. But men and women today, like those in ancient Greece, cannot resist forces stronger than themselves : the terms have changed, but the tragedy remains the same. In this play with its American setting and modern time of action, O'Neill is attempting to rephase the motivations of classical tragedy so as to relate them to our own doubts, fears, and desires, but in the process to give us, also, faith in the creative life force.

Religion of Art

In *The Great God Brown,* this is combined with the more dominant motif of the religion of art. O'Neill defines his purpose in this play as showing "the mystery any one man or woman can feel but not understand as the meaning of any event—or accident—in any life on earth." To give added depth, richness, and suggestiveness he deliberately mixed what we think of as folklore and as revealed religion : Dion Anthony is in part Dionysius, and in part St. Anthony, and he returns for strength to Cybele, the pagan Earth Mother. But this mystical element serves to accentuate the importance of the individual, even as the use of masks to indicate an actor's public or private character emphasizes an individual's complexity. But one person is influenced and changed by others even as he acts upon them, as we grope in the world's half-light for a fuller illumination. Here the reader can identify himself with the characters, can fully comprehend the nature and intensity of their desires, whether or not he accepts the underlying philosophy.

Dubious Philosophies

This is not possible with all his plays, at least for most of us. O'Neill has embraced even more dubious philosophies. In *Dynamo*

He envisioned a man who saw a new god in the whirling wheels of machinery and the weird power of electricity, but this study of a fantastic modernly-grounded religious mania was neither dramatically nor philosophically convincing. O'Neill also flirted briefly and tentatively with Marxism in *Marco Millions*, but it was at best a half-hearted flirtation since he was, soon afterwards, describing communism as "the most grotesque god that ever came out of Asia". Sociological nostrums, especially the theory that man will quickly improve if only his environment be changed for the better, won his half-hearted allegiance in such plays as *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, and *Desire Under the Elms*.

Quest For Meaning

Whether his philosophical ideas had proved satisfying or not, he had consistently attempted to get beyond the literal and factual reality. Both the man and the dramatist seem ever in quest of a valid, tenable explanation of the meaning of life. In that quest he came to Christian Catholicism, and out of it he wrote the moving, but only partially successful *Days Without End*. In this play meaning inheres not in the fountain or the dynamo or the sexual delta, but in the crucifix. He has not abandoned modern terms for modern psychology, and he continues to be concerned with man's essential dualism to such an extent that the two parts of the main character are played by two different actors. Somehow, too, there is little difference in the terms of his Christian characters and those of his earlier non-Christian ones : John Loving believes with the rationalistic part of his mind that "we are all the slaves of meaningless chance", but with the idealistic part that "a new Saviour must be born who will reveal to us how we can be saved from ourselves."

Infinite Behind the Finite

If the play has too much of dramatic and philosophical debate in it to be quite successful as drama, it is the clearest statement we have of O'Neill's constant striving to find a satisfactory philosophy of life. It gives in epitome his own spiritual evolution : he is seeking the infinite behind the finite, searching for something that will add to the dignity of man. Whatever the terms employed, however, unsatisfactory the explanations, O'Neill holds in this play that man's spirit is greater and ultimately more important than man's body. If at times he seems only to have a faith that man must have a faith, he has made an honest and unrelenting search for valid and tenable bases for a faith that will not deny scientific truths but will affirm a deeper, more positive spiritual truth.

Web of Circumstances

"Man is involved in a web of circumstance, a web that is not of his own weaving." O'Neill had begun as a playwright with his

deterministic philosophy of life and the universe; rather disconcertingly, he has partially reverted to it in his later plays. The disturbed and the disturbing state of the world shook his highly rooted faith; even more directly, a serious personal illness in 1934 temporarily ended his dramatic activity; it developed into, or was later diagnosed as, incurable, slowly ravaging, Parkinson's Disease.

Call of the Past

It may be too early to evaluate the work of O'Neill's darker years, but certain unmistakable trends seem dominant. He had turned back into his own past for dramatic material; increasingly he pinned his faith on human love and warmth to give meaning to life; and he presented man lacking the will to act as being spiritually dead, however alive physically he might be. There is a Cathartic quality in these plays, but the purging clearly was intended more for the author than for the audience; O'Neill was attempting to objectify by writing out of himself certain obsessive memories that had haunted him for long. This is made manifest in the brief, moving Foreword to *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, cast in the form of a letter to his wife Carlotta:

> Dearest! I give you the original script of this play of old sorrow, written in tears and blood. A sadly inappropriate gift, it would seem, for a day celebrating happiness. But you will understand. I mean it as a tribute to your love and tenderness which gave me the faith in love that enabled me to face my dead at last and write this play—write it with deep pity and understanding and forgiveness for all the four haunted Tyrones.

Facing the Ghosts

Eugene includes himself among the haunted and he makes no attempt except for changing names to disguise the autobiographical nature of the play. James Tyrone is an immensely popular actor, embittered because he has sacrificed the chance of greatness for immediate popularity, and seeking wealth through ill-timed real state speculations; Mary Tyrone is a drug addict at the younger son's birth, as the doctor gave her morphine to quiet her pains; James Tyrone Jr., is a dipsomaniac, a wastrel, and a jealous-hearted failure. The slightly-built action takes place on the day when Edmund (O'Neill himself) is admitted to have tuberculosis, and is to be sent to a sanatorium.

Pipe Dreams

Of these four, only Edmund has a chance to achieve salvation of any kind in this world. His sickness is physical; his moral nature, although warped, is fundamentally sound. But the sickness in father, mother, and brother is essentially a moral sickness: in seeking to escape from the world they have grown egocentric, cold;

their flashes of warmth are sporadic and to a degree irrational; they have lost the capacity to love and the will to act. Man seeks for security and order, for a sense of belonging, in a mysteriously alien universe. Mary fancies she might have found it if she had become a nun; James, if he had not prostituted his acting ability; James Jr., if he had achieved something—he is not sure quite what. These hopeless escapist fancies lead them inevitably into the past, away from the present: and ahead of them is only the darkly symbolic night.

Illusion and Reality

It is a powerfully written, integrated tragedy, but the motivating force behind each of these tragic figures derives not from the nobility or even ignoble ambition but from insufficiency. In earlier, more objective plays, O'Neill used many devices to point up the contrast between illusion and reality; he levied upon psychology to present an awareness of the difference between conscious and sub-conscious realities. Here the devices are relatively straightforward, but the psychological twistings and turnings are exceedingly complex as the characters attempt to conceal their real thoughts and motivations not only from each other but from themselves, until driven by some compulsive inner force to confess the sub-conscious reality.

Action Conceals Character

There is something of the detective story technique in thus using action to conceal rather than to reveal character. This similarity of method appears even more clearly in *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, where a virgin deliberately masquerades as a loose woman and her warm hearted old Irish father hides a basic goodness under apparent meanness and gruffness. This too is an intensely personal work, and the protagonist is James Tyrone, Jr., and incidents briefly described in *Long Day's Journey Into Night* are in this play developed and made a necessary part of the dramatic action. It is set later in time. Mrs. Tyrone had died in California; on the train bringing her body east, her son seeks forgetfulness and peace in an alcoholic orgy with a prostitute. This should not be read as strictly biographical O'Neill needed one specific dramatic incident to focus and pin-point James remorse at having betrayed himself as well as his mother, but this is only the ultimate betrayal. The young man who could not enjoy horse racing because of impatience to get back to his hotel room and his solitary drinking had already succumbed; the incident is needed dramatically to underline and make concrete his loss of values, but it only emphasizes the sub-conscious reality by making apparent the conscious reality.

Theme of Death

O'Neill's theme of death reappears, even more explicitly. Phil and Josie Hogan are alive because they have warmth and the

ability to love ; James is empty, and Josie cradling the man who has fallen asleep in her arms perceptively remarks : "God forgive me, it is a fine end to all my scheming, to sit here with the dead hugged to my breast, and the silly mug of the moon grinning down, enjoying the joke." As human beings Josie and her father have many defects, but they have also a quality of aliveness that James has killed in himself, so that Josie tenderly and pityingly can wish only for the man she loves : "May you have your wish and die in your sleep soon, Jim, darling. May you rest forever in forgiveness and peace."

Personal Values

The title "A Moon for the Misbegotten" implies that James had never at any time had any real chance to be different, to control his own destiny. He was misbegotten truly, whereas Josie is so only because she has freely given her love to an emotionally dead man, incapable of returning that love. Is this a sibling's pity for an older brother, or an attitude towards life ? The intensely personal nature of the play, the felt need of Catharsis for the author, makes interpretation doubly difficult. Yet clearly O'Neill believes that it is not enough to be loved ; one must be capable of giving out as well as of taking in if one is to be saved, in this world or the next. In these two plays there is no hint that salvation may be won by a faith or a philosophy, for all the values are personal ones. The person rather than the idea, O'Neill seems to be saying, gives a meaning to life.

Hopeless Waiting

Since it is less subjective, *The Iceman Cometh* should provide a better test as to meaning than the autobiographical works. Unfortunately the tone is that of the dream-phantasia, and expressionistic distortion has been carried so far that the philosophical line of thought has been obscured From the heavily ironic title, with the iceman or death substituted for the life giving bridegroom, to the commentary that these are men "scared of life, but even more scared of dying", the tone and the action emphasize this note of hopeless waiting.

Freedom-Giving Action

The group of men in Harry Hope's saloon, back in 1912, have diverse backgrounds but all have two items in common : each has in his part a cankerous secret that has so corrupted him that he has lost the will to act and the power to make decisions ; each has taken refuge in a deadening alcoholic daze (only Hemingway's literary characters equal O'Neill's as two handed drinkers, but even Hemingway does not make drinking the avenue to mental escape that O'Neill does). As the play opens, they are waiting for a hardware salesman. Hickey, who in the past has without really disturbing them managed to give a transitory joyousness, an illusion

of aliveness. This time, when Hickey appears he introduces a disturbingly new note, for he has acquired the will to act, and he has acted. He is an irritating stimulus, goading each man to act, goading each man compulsively to reveal the secret that haunts him. Each makes an abortive effort to face reality. When Hickey's freedom-giving action is revealed as the murder of the wife whom he has subconsciously hated for her goodness, the men passively subside into their accustomed and reasonably painless alcoholic waiting.

Negative Affirmation

This is curious reversal of the other two plays. Here it is the person who deprives life of its meaning, as though O'Neill were presenting the other side of the same coin. In *Long Day's Journey Into Night* Edmund at least has warmth and potentialities ; in *A Moon for the Misbegotten* Josie and Phil Hogan have warmth and an inner if well concealed integrity. The denials and negations are set against affirmations. In *The Icemen Cometh* there is at best only a negative affirmation : that these men are essentially dead because in their egocentricity they have lost the qualities that give a meaning to life. They are no longer capable of human love or even the will to act. Each one reveals the conscious act and the subconscious reasons behind the act that have deprived him of the power to make and carry out a decision. In so far as each was responsible for his own actions, the play is not deterministic. But O'Neill never really indicates how much choice a man had, or how far he was simply a puppet in the web of circumstances—and of circumstances not of his own making.

The Dream Motif

A Touch of the Poet is related to these highly personal dramas only in that O'Neill continues to use the dream-motif as a means of denying or evading the too harsh realities of life. The time is 1828 ; the setting a village tavern near Boston. Cornelius Melody, ex-Major, ex-gentleman, and presently tavern-keeper, lives in his memories of earlier gallantry in love and war ; as his realistic daughter ironically remarks : "God help you, it must be a wonderful thing to live in a fairy tale where only dreams are real to you." When the dream is shattered, when Melody is inexorably forced to admit to himself his actual situation, the man dies even while he continues to live. His wife recognizes this all too clearly when she tells her daughter : "Look at the dead face on him, Sara. He is like a corpse."

Quest For Faith

Even in this non-autobiographical play O'Neill's quest for a valid faith has shifted from the philosophical to the personal. The wife and daughter are vital because they have the human warmth to give themselves completely to love. In the autobiographical

plays this contrast between emotional life and emotional death is made even more explicit. In one sense, O'Neill as dramatist had changed radically. He was less interested in digging at the roots of the world's sickness than in delving directly into his own mental and spiritual past. That the values he expressed dramatically are also values that had personal meaning is partially borne out by the concluding paragraph to his wife in *Long Day's Journey Into Night*: "These twelve years, Beloved One, have been a journey into Light—into Love."

Human Love

With human love there is light. Implicit in these plays, also, are overtones suggesting that human love is in itself divine, that as long as man retains inside himself warmth and feeling his plight is known to an understanding and forgiving God. Especially near the end of *Long Day's Journey Into Night* are these transcendental overtones heard, in Eugene's handling of the baffling, tragic inter-relationships in his own family. In this respect he seems nearer to a Catholic fatalism than to scientific determinism. He has described (through Edmund) in his own life occasional mystical experiences when "the moment of ecstatic freedom came. The peace, the end of the quest, the last harbour, the joy of belonging to a fulfilment beyond men's lousy, pitiful, greedy fears and hopes and dreams......Like a saint's vision of the beatitude. Like the evil of things as they seem drawn back by an unseen hand. For a second you see—and seeing the secret, are the secret. For a second there is meaning! Then the hand lets the veil fall and you are alone, lost in the fog again and you stumble on towards nowhere, for no good reason!"

The Grim Dichotomy

This is the dilemma, the grim dichotomy that O'Neill has struggled with and never quite mastered. With his rational mind he has seen men struggling on towards nowhere, but he has seen also (possibly not with his eyes) that they both see the secret and are the secret. In rationalistic determinism nothing is hidden, eventually, to the finite mind, for the reason that there is nothing unseen. If O'Neill's visions were momentary, sporadic, and unconnected, he felt nevertheless that these visions were real—as actual as, say, the eating of bread or drinking of wine. As his faith in the abstract idea or the philosophic or theological doctrine warned, he substituted for it the warmth of human love. However, unorthodox an approach to divinity this may be, it gives a mellow underlying richness to the otherwise dark autobiographical plays.

5

Illusion and Reality in O'Neill's Plays

The Two Poles of Action

Illusion and reality are the two poles between which the action of most of the plays of O'Neill moves. "The lie of a pipe dream is what gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot of us, drunk or sober", says Larry Slade in *The Iceman Cometh*, voicing thereby a basic tension in a majority of O'Neill's plays, from *Bound East to Cardiff* onward.

Spatial-Temporal Polarity

Strange Interlude and *Mourning Becomes Electra* provide us clear elaboration of what illusion and reality can mean. Illusion is ever a reaching towards Yeats' Byzantium, a world of changeless and enduring forms. It may lie in Professor Leeds' library, where "a fugitive from reality can view the present safely from a distance"; or in the church where Marsden plans to marry Nina, "a gray ivied chapel, full of restful shadow, symbolical of the peace we have found." Or—and this is its noblest articulation—in the Garden of Eden, the Blessed Isles where one can forget "all men's dirty dreams of greed and power!" Conversely, so long as men dwell in the *real* world they strive and suffer, love and hate, are born and die. Seen as an attempt to conquer time, illusion is anchored in the past or the future, reality in the present. For O'Neill the meaning of life derives in large part from the oscillations which this spatial-temporal polarity sets in motion.

Myth of the Garden

Let us consider the story of Nina Leeds. On the point of withdrawing from her long war with life and returning to the ancestral home, she thinks, "the only living life is in the past and future...the present is an interlude......strange interlude in which we call on past and future to bear witness we are living!"; for her reality is a time of pain which will pass It is in the myth of the Garden, however, that the spatial and temporal qualities of

illusion ultimately concentre. Before the Fall death and passion were not ; natural man has long aspired to such an ideal, if illusory, state. When he acts on this aspiration, which is rarely, the consequence is tragedy. While most men come in time to recognize the tension between their real and their ideal self, only he is tragic who attempts to bridge the distance between. Tragic action, in other words, is motivated by what Arthur Miller has described as man's "inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status. Only the passive, only those who accept their lot without active retaliation, are 'flawless'. Most of us are in that category."

O'Neill's World-View

Towards understanding how illusion and reality function in O'Neill's plays, it is necessary to define his world-view. In 1925 he wrote : "I'm always acutely conscious of the Force behind—(Fate, God, our biological past creating our present, whatever one calls it—Mystery certainly)—and of the one eternal tragedy of Man in his glorious, self-destructive struggle to make the Force express him instead of being, as an animal is, an infinitesimal incident in its expression." In only three plays—*The Fountain*, *Lazarus Laughed*, and *Days Without End*—is God, the Hebraic-Christian God, clearly the Force behind. In all the others O'Neill shows himself to be a naturalist, though occasionally he makes the Force mythic (thus, the Earth-Mother in *The Great God Brown* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*). Fate he conceives of as a natural process : it may be physical as in *Dynamo*, psychological as in *Mourning Becomes Electra* and *The Iceman Cometh*, biological as in *Welded* and *Desire Under the Elms*, commercial as in *Marco Millions*. In this last play, for instance, Kublai Kaan thinks : "My hideous suspicion is that God is only an infinite, insane energy which creates and destroys without other purpose than to pass eternity in avoiding thought. Then the stupid man becomes the Perfect Incarnation of Omnipotence and the Polos are the true children of God !" O'Neill's misbegotten men and women, then, inhabit a world superintended by natural forces, not divine. Listen to his women early and late : before her reconciliation with Matt Burke, Anna Christie tells her father, "We're all poor nuts, and things happen, and we just get mixed in wrong, that's all" ; and Mary Tyrone, off in a dope dream, says : "None of us can help the things life has done to us. They're done before you realise it, and once they're done they make you do other things until at last everything comes between you and what you'd like to be, and you've lost your true self forever." Their cries are born of confusion, frustration, and despair and are echoed in most of the other plays.

The Moral Struggle

Even though O'Neill says in effect that modern man lives in a world that is without theistic purpose, this world view has a positive side. A century ago the theory of natural selection threatened the concept of a universe whose design was supernaturally sanctioned. In a daring move American pragmatism, accepting this theory as valid, set out to solve the dilemma : how in a world which no longer possesses theistic purpose, human purpose can be said to exist. It was eventually John Dewey who, extending natural selection to cover mental activity as well as physical, reasoned that "evolutionary method applied to a moral fact...reveals to us a single continuing process in which both animal instinct and the sense of duty have their place......the process and the forces bound up with the cosmic have come to consciousness in man. That which was instinct in the animal is conscious impulse in man...I question whether the spiritual life does not get its surest and most ample guarantees when it is learned that the laws and conditions of righteousness are implicated in the working processes of the universe ; when it is found that man in his conscious struggles, in his doubts, temptations, and defeats, in his aspirations and successes ; is moved on and buoyed up by the forces which have developed nature ; and that in this moral struggle he acts not as a mere individual but as an organ in maintaining and carrying forward the universal process."

Sense of Order

Implicit in Dewey's argument was the conviction that the human will, whose operations are naturalistically grounded, imposes upon the world such order as it possesses and that therefore this sense of order is necessarily moral. In the pragmatic dialectic, then, human intelligence may be said to have supplanted divine. Human nature being moral, ethically meaningful behaviour is still possible. But few live thus, struggling to make "the Force behind" express them ; the mass of men give up the moral struggle, trusting that illusion will bring order out of the chaos of their present.

Genesis of Chaos

This chaos, which results when the counterpoise between head and heart is disturbed. began when man left the cave and journeyed towards his present state of civilization. Literally and allegorically *The Hairy Ape* describes how such divorce comes about. So long as the animalistic Yank is free to dream of making "iron into steel", he scoffs at the illusions of Long and Paddy and knows a measure of peace; but when Mildred Douglas intrudes on his domain, he is cut adrift from his primordial moorings. Lost between the Neanderthal world of the stokehole and that of man thinking, now belonging in neither, he cries out : "I ain't on oith

and I ain't in heaven, get me ? I'm in de middle tryin' to separate 'em, takin' all de woist punches from bot' of 'em." Such fragmentation of personality and the search for integration are a constant in the plays. In *Beyond the Horizon*, for example, Andrew Mayo, having spent eight years running away from himself, gambling with the very thing he once loved to create, finally determines to do penance so that he may win back the "harmonious partnership" with life he had once known.

Way to Integration

There was a time when formal religion provided a way to integration. In *The Fountain*, for example, Juan Ponce de Leon, his life ebbing away at a Dominican monastery, surrenders his dream of physical youth (symbolized finally by his love for Beatriz) and at the point of death discovers spiritual calm. Today, however, religion seldom holds out such a hope. Perhaps it does in *Welded*, wherein Michael Cape, possessing "the forehead of a thinker, the eyes of a dreamer, the nose and mouth of a sensualist", is in harmony with himself at the moment that his overwhelming love for Eleanor and hers for him is sanctified. Certainly it does not in *Great God Brown*, for here the mask man holds up to the world is seen to be at war with the face he shows himself. To Margaret and the world at large Dion Anthony presents himself masked as "a mocking, reckless, defiant, gayly scoffing and sensual young Pan", all the while knowing his own face to be "dark, spiritual, poetic, passionately supersensitive, helplessly unprotected in its childlike, religious faith in life." When the world, as O'Neill explained, "condemns the Pan-mask it sees,......Dion's inner self retrogresses along the line of Christian resignation until it partakes of the nature of the Saint while at the same time the outer Pan is slowly transformed by his struggle with reality into Mephistopheles." Nor is the struggle less intense for Brown when he assumes the dead Dion's mask. Both Dion and Brown labour for a time under the illusion that Margaret can satisfy their needs and make possible for each of them a harmonious partnership with life ; but it is a role she does not fancy and is in fact incapable of playing. Eventually they turn to Cybel, the Earth Mother, who affords refuge from the pain of living and, when death is at hand, offers final understanding and consolation.

The Rich Ambiguities

Let us now examine more closely the tension between illusion and reality present in *Strange Interlude*, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, and *The Iceman Cometh*. All three plays are rich in ambiguities, which accounts in part for their greatness. Nina Leeds, haunted by the ghost of her dead lover Gordon Shaw, confuses "the real and the unreal", "as always in all minds" ; thinks of Marsden cynically,

"or how could men live ?" From O'Neill's initial description it is apparent that her nature is divided against itself: "a fine athletic girl of the swimmer, tennis player, golfer type", her whole manner "is strained, nerve-racked, hectic, a terrible tension of will alone maintaining self-possession." Her strange interlude is one long frantic pursuit of happiness. In young motherhood she seems on the point of finding it. For one grotesque, precarious moment, when she feels the desires of husband, lover, father, and son converge in her, she stands hysterically triumphant. But the moment passes and she succumbs once more to her neurosis. All her desperate recipes for happiness failing—"praying to the modern science God", marriage to Sam Evans, conceiving a normal child by Ned Darrell and the "interludes of passion" which accompany this adultery—Nina finally rids herself of her ghost-lover by letting her son go. Huddling against Marsden, she declares in words which bracket the long years of her interlude : "Gordon is dead, father. I've just had a cable. What I mean is, he flew away to another life—my son, Gordon, Charlie. So we're alone again—just as we used to be." Now she can relive "that period of happy security, of health and peace of mind" before ever she met Gordon Shaw.

Retreat Into Illusion

With the laying of the ghost the father image re-emerges in her life. "I'll go and live in Father's old home", she muses at the end : "Charlie will come in every day and visit." This readmission of father into her life marks a retreat into illusion, for the surrogate Marsden "isn't built to face reality". Her long struggle to make "the Force behind" express her is a near-heroic attempt to make God a Mother, but in surrendering to it she becomes "an infinitesimal incident in its expression". She gains stability but only at the terrible expense of obliterating what remains in her of passionate womanhood. Her final attitude is *fin de siecle*, one in which she, like Ernest Dowson, might well declare: "I was desolate and sick of an old passion."

The Blessed Isles

The Blessed Isles, experienced vicariously and later actually, embody Lavinia Mannon's illusion. Initially—and in her mind this association is never broken—she identifies them with Adam Brant, who had been shipwrecked there. "I remember", she tells him, "your admiration for the naked native women. You said they had found the street of happiness because they had never heard that love can be a sin." Whereas the Isles represent for Christine simply a romantic happiness that Ezra's love-making had destroyed and for Orin a *Typee*-like "way to peace" and Mother, Lavinia's illusion is far nobler—the longing to return to that ideal state before the Fall. It is not simply or primarily Adam the man whom she loves, but the freedom which the world he has glimpsed open up for her.

Eventually she too travels to the South Seas and witnesses this world for herself. Back home, she describes the experience to Peter Niles, whom she now hopes to marry; "I loved those islands. They finished setting me free. There was something there mysterious and beautiful—a good spirit—of love—coming out of the land and sea. It made me forget death. There was no hereafter. There was only this world—the warm earth in the moonlight—the trade wind in the coco palms—the surf on the reef—the fires at night and the drum throbbing in my heart—the natives dancing naked and innocent—without knowledge of sin!" But then, like Arthur Dimmesdale to whom Hester's suggestion that they flee Boston opened up the prospect of moral anarchy, Lavinia checks herself abruptly and frightenedly, sobered by the realization that such illusory freedom runs counter to her nature and heritage. Desperately she will cling to the illusion a while longer, so desperately in fact that Orin cannot get through to her and take himself out of life. Hazel, here functioning symbolically, pleads with her: "Look into your heart and ask your conscience before God if you ought to marry Peter!... I know in your heart you can't be dead to all honour and justice—you, a Mannon!"

Confrontation With Reality

When "at the topmost pitch of desperate, frantic abandonment" Lavinia calls Peter "Adam", she is brought face to face with reality. "Always the dead between!" she mutters hopelessly. "It's no good trying any more!" At this moment she stops playing the coward and acknowledges what she has known always: the fact that her finite nature makes unattainable for her, as it must for every man, the Adamic illusion. Although her curtain speech carries suggestions of masochism (which actually serve to render her more human), these are unmistakably the words of a courageous woman who, seeing through her illusion, assumes responsibility for the guilt of family and race.

Terrors of the Real Present

Larry Slade, the fine central intelligence of *The Iceman Cometh*, is also a tragic hero. Rosa Parritt nearly shattered his faith in mankind by playing him false; but even though he left the Movement at that time, he loves her still and through such love keeps his hold on the magnetic chain of humanity against the day when someone may call for help. When her indecisive son comes to him as the one person in the world he can turn to, Larry holds out a helping hand and reasserts thereby his long-lost faith. Only by recognizing how the lives of Hickey, Parritt, and Slade interact can we properly gauge what makes this action tragic. All three men see clearly, as Harry Hope and his roomers never can, the lie of the pipe dream. Hickey and Parritt felt compelled to destroy the dreams

which Evelyn and Rosa tried to impose on them but quail now under the terrors of the real present and seek death as the only possible way to peace. Sensing that their lives run on parallel tracks, they make common cause to show Larry up to himself and force him to assume responsibility for the first time since he left the Movement. He alone of the three possesses sufficient strength of character to act in a responsible fashion and does so act when he tells Parritt: "Go! Get the hell out of life...Go, for the love of Christ, you mad tortured bastard, for your own sake!" Profoundly grateful for this needed reassurance, Parritt leaves quietly to take the leap from the fire escape. When the thud sounds outside the window, Larry, a "long-forgotten faith" returning to him, mumbles: "God rest his soul in peace."

Meaningful Action

Giving Parritt the signal to commit suicide is Larry's meaningful action, nor is it negated by the mood of self-derision which follows. At this moment he becomes the "useful member" of society he had long refused to be. Never again will he help others sustain their pipe dreams in order to find peace of mind for himself. Having finally accepted the responsibility life demanded of him, he leaves the grandstand forever and accepts the pain and exaltation of living in the present. Here then, O'Neill would have us believe, is the dilemma confronting modern man; illusion brings order out of the chaos of the present but incapacitates him for meaningful action, and yet without illusion life is intolerable for all but the sturdy few like Laviuia Mannon and Larry Slade. Meaningful action is possible only when man strips off his illusions and, fronting the terrors of the here and now, acts in obedience to a secret impulse of his character.

6

Social Criticism in O'Neill's Plays Or O'Neill as a Social Critic

Failure of the American Dream

"I'm going on the theory that the United States, instead of being the most successful country in the world, is the greatest failure", said O'Neill in 1946. In a friendly conversation with Croswell Bowen, he told him : "This American Dream stuff gives me pain. Telling the world about our American Dream ? I don't know what they mean. If it exists, as we tell the whole world, why don't we make it work in one small hamlet in the United States ?...If it's the constitution that they mean, ugh, then it's a lot of words. If we taught history and told the truth, we'd teach school children that the United States has followed the same greedy rut as every other country. We would tell who's guilty. The list of the guilty ones responsible would include some of our great national heroes. Their portraits should be taken out and burned." Clearly O'Neill is a critic of American society and society as a whole. Now it may be argued that a play which resolves itself into an argument against capitalism or against anything else loses its value as art even though sympathy for the author's point of view may be quite universal. But the opposite is also true. A work of art which is divorced from man's struggle with an unfriendly and an unmoral universe and with a perverted and corrupt social order loses the most abiding appeal that art can have for man. O'Neill's tremendous success as a dramatist depends to a great extent upon the fact that he has had something to say about the modern social order that has been worth saying. His technique and his form have been admirable vehicles for an interpretation of the conflict which arises out of the circumstances of the world in which we live.

Social Injustice

In *Fog*, an early one-act play, O'Neill's point of view is clearly stated. It is more of an argument than a play, but for the purpose of understanding O'Neill's social philosophy it has real value. Fog is symbolic of the state of mind of the businessman who is adrift

in a boat with a poet, a woman and a dead child. When the businessman expresses concern over the child's death, the poet replies by giving a lecture on social injustice which surrounds the lives of the poor. He says :

> What chance had that poor child ? Naturally sickly and weak from underfeeding, transplanted to the stinking room of a tenement or the filthy hovel of a mining village, what glowing opportunities did life hold out that death should not be regarded as a blessing for him ? I mean if he possessed the ordinary amount of ability and intelligence—considering him as the average child of ignorant Polish immigrants. Surely his prospects of ever becoming anything but a beast of burden were not bright, were they ?

Doubtful Negative

The businessman answers with a doubtful negative, which implies that he thinks there should be some way out. He expresses the usual vague hope of those who find it hard to face reality. The poet then pushes the problem still further by asking an embarrassing question : "If you could bring him back to life, would you do so ? Could you conscientiously drag him away from that fine sleep of his to face what he would have to face ? Leaving the joy you would give his mother out of the question, would you do it for him individually ?"

The Victims of Industrial System

The implications of these questions are very general. They apply not only to the dead child in the boat, but to millions of unfortunate victims of our industrial system. It is as though O'Neill had said : "If you were God, would you not prevent this monstrous abortion called the living poor ?" What right have we to permit life to be born that exists only for slavery or worse than slavery—a life of neglect and suffering to end in a charity bread line, and a pauper's grave ? The poet is explicit, and defines his terms : "I mean poverty—the most deadly and prevalent of all diseases." The businessman is irritated by such a statement and tries to escape by asserting that he is "not responsible for the way the world is run". And the poet replies: "But you are responsible", continuing : "I mean supposing we—the self-satisfied, successful members of society—are responsible for the injustice visited upon the heads of our less fortunate 'brothers-in-Christ' because of our shameful indifference to it. We see misery all around us and we do not care. We do nothing to prevent it. Are we not then, in part at least, responsible for it ? Have you ever thought of that ?"

Man in Social Order

O'Neill has thought a great deal about that and has given his answer in many different plays. It is because he has thought of man in relation to his social system that his plays have become something more than a moment's entertainment. It is not man as an individual alone that concerns O'Neill; it is man in a social order, tortured, starved, disillusioned, thwarted and driven to disaster by the forces of a system which cares nothing for the general welfare of society. Man moves across the stage of an O'Neill play not as a free and detached individual, not merely as an individual in relation to a few characters who are associated with him in the immediate drama which makes the play, but he treats man against a rich background of social forces. Beyond the backdrop, before the beginning of the play, and beyond the ending lies a definite social system that is as important to an appreciation of the play as is the action which takes place on the stage in the presence of the audience. It is the skill with which the dramatist has made his audience aware of this larger significance of his theme that lends to O'Neill's drama its rich, sympathetic tone. It is the social implication that makes his play have a life in the mind of the audience after it has left the theatre and scattered to the quiet of individual thought.

The Social Implications

That O'Neill is concerned with the problem of man in relation to the present social order is apparent in all of his plays. Even those that use an historical background come under this classification. The social implication of the greed for empire is boldly set forth in *The Fountain* and the direct criticism of modern business ideals is the whole theme of *Marco Millions*. In such a purely fantastic drama as *The Emperor Jones*, O'Neill does not permit us to forget the social implication. When Brutus Jones lost his nerve in the forest, the grim shadows of his past came to haunt him. And what were they? Slavery, crime, penitentiaries, the whole vicious, illogical structure of our modern industrial world, which goad the poverty-stricken day and night to commit crime, and then when it is committed, punishes the criminal it has helped to make—punishes without reference to the causes that inspired the crime. Jones escaped the direct punishment, but he could not escape the deep scars left by a vicious system. In the pantomime of the prison scene and at the auction mart our social order as well as the character of Jones is clearly revealed.

Social Criticism in The Hairy Ape

The Hairy Ape is among the more significant plays of social criticism. It presents a negative view of the state, of mechanized America, where the worker best adjusted to the system is a 'hairy ape'.

and where the "Capitalist class" is even more terribly dehumanized, for it has lost all connection with life, is simply 'a procession of gaudy marionettes'. According to this play, both government and religion are devices for maintaining the status quo. The church substitutes political conservatism for Christianity, substitutes bazaars, methods of making money, for a concern with the meaning of life and death. Government is equally at the service of the marionettes. On the legislative side, it is exemplified by the windy oratory of Senator Queen, glorifying the status quo and denouncing with ignorant terror any threat to it like the I.W.W. On the enforcement side, it is exemplified by police who function to keep the workers from disturbing the wealthy. On the whole, the state, as pictured in *The Hairy Ape* is a device for dehumanizing its citizens, and for preventing change

Condemnation of Machine Civilization

The play is not a protest against low wages and unemployment as is the case in the traditional social drama, Hauptmann's *The Weavers*, for example, but it is a condemnation of the whole structure of machine civilization, a civilization which succeeds only when it destroys the psychological well-being of those who make it possible. It is this which gives the play universality and enlists the sympathy and understanding of the audience. It is a play which might be called by any of the many titles of books that describe the disintegration of modern civilization ; it is a part of the *Decline of the West*. Because of its deep psychological and philosophical implication *The Hairy Ape* cannot be classed with a type of social drama which solves a problem and points a way out. The sickness of the machine age is not wholly a problem of relating production and consumption. It goes much deeper than that. The whole concept of life, of man's relation to the world, of his place in it is involved. Yank was not concerned about distribution—vitally important as that is—he wanted to be a creative part of the social structure, and no man working in the stoke-hole of a liner or making the two hundred and fifty-sixth part of a shoe in regulation eight-hour shifts can ever 'belong' in the same sense that man belonged as a creative worker in the eighteenth century. Yank is a protest against the mordant success of the machine age.

The Diseases of Acquisitive Society

The importance of O'Neill as a social critic lies in the fact that he emphasizes the psychological aspect of the modern social order. He points out the disease of America's acquisitive society. He does not merely stress the fact that workers are exploited to create wealth for the few, but shows how in our modern machine-made world they are deprived of the sense of harmony and mental well-being that comes from doing something that seems important and necessary.

Man's work is a necessary part of his personality ; it is an extension of his ego ; it makes him feel that he is a necessary part of the life of the world in which he lives. Modern industry tends to destroy this psychological counterpart of work, and in so far as it does, it leaves the worker a nervous, irritable and dissatisfied misfit. Yank was such a worker, and at the same time, conscious of the thing he had lost. He didn't want a job simply because it would be a means to earning a living ; he wanted a job in which he could live.

Social Inequalities

In *All God's Chillun Got Wings* this problem is carried out still further and applied to one of the great problems of social inequality in modern America. The American Negro is technically free, but psychologically he is still in bondage. The social pressure of a society that cannot overcome its race prejudice makes Jim a failure and drives Ella to insanity. It may well be argued that the Negro needs economic security, but beyond that, then what ? Jim tried it and failed. He failed because the social system denied him something that he wanted more than wages and votes, it denied him the right to belong. Here O'Neill has selected the material out of which the modern Negro's tragedy is perpetuated beyond the termination of his physical slavery. He has arraigned the deep and powerful prejudices of American civilization before the bar of true justice.

The Tyranny of Quantity

Marco Millions is an excellent study in the social concept of the Western business ideal. Marco serves as a symbol for big business. Although the play deals with Marco Polo and Kublai Kaan, one has no difficulty in recognizing him as a good American business man whose ideal of life is to buy cheap and sell dear. O'Neill has given to this play a touch of light satire which makes his criticism of modern society all the more penetrating. O'Neill seems to hold that the profit motive is at the root of the evil in Western civilization. The profit motive destroys that which is best and noblest in man, making him into a beast who is capable of no great passions and no real love of the beautiful and the good. Under the deadly influence of this practical ideal, he becomes an excellent judge of quantity, and believes that quantity is synonymous with quality.

Emptiness of Money-Seekers

O'Neill has stressed in his plays the personal weakness of those who strive for wealth. Billy Brown is helpless without the creative strength of Dion Anthony. Marco Polo becomes despondent when lack of external activity forces him to think. Sam Evans, the successful businessman of *Strange Interlude*, is totally without inner resources. "How weak he is !" his wife thinks early in the play. When he gains power, it is purely external : "What a fount of

meaningless energy he's tapped !...always on the go...typical, terrible child of the age." In an earlier play *Lazarus Laughed*, O'Neill showed that the craving for political power is also a compensation for inward weakness, emptiness. The depraved, power-mad Caligula is above all, weak, frightened, spiritually dead. After murdering Tiberius, he cries savagely to the empty amphitheatre: "Kneel down! Abase yourselves ! I am your Ceasar and your God !" But, a moment later, he becomes aware of his loneliness, and ends by "grovelling in a paroxysm of terror".

Condemnation of the Status Quo

All those who seek wealth, power over others, in the plays of Eugene O'Neill, do so out of personal weakness. When they do gain power, wealth, they are 'poorer thereby'. This interpretation of financial, worldly success, was behind O'Neill's declaration that the United States is "the greatest failure". As he explained : "We are the greatest example of 'For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ?' " O'Neill's most bitter condemnation of the status quo is thus based on his Nietzschean philosophy. Both O'Neill and Nietzsche believe that the state produces soulless conformity, that those who seek worldly power and money, do so out of inner weakness and sterility. O'Neill, like Nietzsche, looked for his answer in the individual soul of man. Like Nietzsche he believed that salvation is a "question for the single one".

Search For Better Men

O'Neill believed that individuals must gain the "courage to possess their own souls" before man can begin to think of establishing a just society. As Larry Slade of *The Iceman Cometh* puts it: "The material the ideal free society must be constructed from is men themselves and you can't build a marble temple out of a mixture of mud and manure. When man's soul isn't a sow's ear, it will be time enough to dream of silk purses." For O'Neill, then, it is not a better state that makes better men, but better men who make a better state.

Evils of Social Dis-Organization

The world revealed by Eugene O'Neill is tragic because it is without intelligent social organization. Ignorance, brutality, selfishness, greed and hatred are the dominant forces in this world of O'Neill. The multitude of men and women who pass by in the imagination as one tries to envision the sum total of life that O'Neill has presented in his plays is a sorry lot. Here by the roadside lies a young man coughing his lungs out as he cries for the beauty which lies beyond the horizon ; here is a girl tortured into committing a murder ; another passes with a fixed look of dry-eyed sorrow that is

just breaking into insanity over her lover killed in war ; a handsome Negro passes with the sorrow of hopeless despair furrowing every line of his face ; in a narrow room another breaks under the strain of life as his fevered imagination turns gilded trinkets into gold ; in the cold seas of the north a woman goes mad from loneliness ; in a beautiful New England home starved and misguided love brings endless tragedy ; and so one could go on with the enumeration.

What's Wrong and Where

And what has turned potential happiness for these human beings into sure and grim tragedy ? Is it that there is something in nature that makes these hard hearts ? Is it that man is doomed by his humanity to make every third thought his grave ? No doubt that is partially the truth, or at least the only truth that we have tried and practised. But O'Neill also emphasizes the fact of a social system which is destructive in itself, which thwarts every effort to achieve happiness, which puts a value on misery and pain as a good in itself, and worst of all encourages and rewards everything that is predatory and destructive, condemning beauty, well-being and happiness as a sin.

7

Dialogue in O'Neill's Plays

Natural Rhythms of Beauty

A study of O'Neill's plays raises a number of questions about his dialogue, his use of the spoken word to delineate character, to fill in the necessary background, to suggest the true quality of dramatic moments. Although he professes to have "laboured with the spoken word to evolve original rhythms of beauty", he often has failed to allow characters to speak for themselves, has obtruded his own feelings and thoughts, and has allowed himself to repeat over and again certain general speech habits that have little relation to natural speech. One might consider two phases of his dialogue, the natural, in which he seemed to turn his inner ear to the speech of his characters, and the literary, or rhetorical, in which he spoke, in often rather fulsome extravagance, for the characters he created.

The Two Phases of Dialogue

"When ye kin make corn sprout out o' stones, God's livin' in yew !" says flinty old Ephraim Cabot, the father in *Desire Under the Elms*. Nina in the nine-act trilogy, *Strange Interlude* says : "Strange Interlude ! Yes, our lives are merely strange dark interludes in the electric display of God the Father !" These two quotations might be taken as samples of the difference between O'Neill's natural idiomatic dialogue of the early plays and the grandiose rhetoric that became habitual in the later ones. Ephraim Cabot's line comes out of his own experience and belongs to him, whereas Nina is only the mouthpiece of the playwright.

Authentic Speech

The *S.S. Glencairn* one-act plays are still among the most distinguished of American short plays. His first produced play, for example, *Bound East for Cardiff*, suggests the sorry life of a motley crew, briefly sketches the story of real friendship between two homeless seamen, and portrays the last moments in the life of

Yank, bravely trying to face death. O'Neill, writing without affectation, suggests the authentic speech of several different nationals. In a second example, *The Long Voyage Home*, he characterizes in a few lines a low dive on the London Waterfront, the gross proprietor and his stooges, seamen from the *S. S. Glencairn*, and particularly the unfortunate Olson. The dialogue suggests speech such as he might have heard :

> *Joe.* I ain't speakin' on'y fur meself. Down't I always give ye yer share, fair and square, as man to man ?
>
> *Nick.* (*With a sneer*) Yus—b'cause you 'as to.
>
> *Joe.* 'As to ? Listen to 'im ! There's many'd be 'appy to 'ave your berth, me man !
>
> *Nick.* Yus ? Wot wiv the peelers li'ble to put me away in the bloody jail fur crimpin', an' all ?
>
> *Joe.* (*Indignantly*) We down't do no crimpin'.
>
> *Nick.* (*Sarcastically*) Ho, now ! Not arf !
>
> *Joe.* (*A bit embarrassed*) Well, on'y a bit now an' agen when there ain't no reg'lar trade. (*To hide his confusion he turns to the barmaid angrily. She is still mopping off the bar, her chin on her breast, half-asleep.*) 'Ere, me gel, we've 'ad enough o' that. You been a—moppin', an' a-moppin', an' a-moppin' the blarsted bar fur a'ole 'our. 'Op it o' this ! You'd fair guv a bloke the shakes a-watchin' yer.

Clipped and Credible Speech

In another early play, *Desire Under the Elms*, O'Neill has written a clipped and credible New England speech, one which is in harmony with the characters of the play. In that crucial scene in which Abbie learns how her own words have ruined her, words casually spoken to the old man she married before she came to love Eben, a scene which telescopes the whole range of feeling she has had for Eben, O'Neill wrote some of his best dialogue. Eben's love for Abbie turned to hate when he learned that she had made use of him for her own advantage, unaware that her love for him has become the most compelling part of her life :

> *Eben.* (*scrambling to his feet and following her—accusingly*) Ye're nothin' but a stinkin' passel o' lies ! Ye've been lyin' t' me every word ye spoke, day an' night, since we fust—done it. Ye've kept sayin' ye loved me....

Abbie. (*frantically*) I do love ye ! ...

Eben. (*unheeding*) Ye've made a fool o' me—a sick, dumb fool—a purpose ! Ye've been on'y playin' yer sneakin', stealin' game all along—gittin' me t' lie with ye so's ye'd hev a son he'd think was his'n, an' makin' him promise he'd give ye the farm and let me eat dust, if ye did git him a son ! (*Staring at her with anguished, bewildered eyes*) They must be a devil livin' in ye ! T' ain't human t' be as bad as that be !

Abbie. (*Stunned—dully*) He told yew...?

Eben. Hain't it true ? It hain't no good in yew lyin'.

Abbie, frantic and determined to prove to Eben that her love for him has become as real as he thought it originally, makes the desperate promise which, when fulfilled, destroys both of them. The dialogue is emotionally high-keyed, brief and half-articulated, and in the idiom of the characters who speak :

Abbie. An' ye're truly goin' West—goin' t' leave me—all account o' him being born ?

Eben. I'm a-goin' in the mornin'—or may God strike me t' hell !

Abbie. (*After a pause—with a dreadful cold intensity—slowly*) If that's what his comin's done t' me—killin' yewr love—takin' yew away—me on'y joy—the on'y joy I ever knowed—like heaven t' me—purtier'n heaven—then I hate him, too, even if I be his Maw !

Eben. (*bitterly*) Lies ! Ye love him ! He'll steal the farm fur ye ! (*Brokenly*) But t' ain't the farm so much—not no more—it's yew foolin' me gittin' me t' love ye—lyin' yew loved—me—jest t' git a son t' steal !

Abbie. (*distractedly*) He won't steal ! I'd kill him fust ! I do love ye ! I'll prove t' ye...!

Secondary Speech

O'Neill, in his attempts to broaden the possibilities of the theatre, quite early left the realistic manner for the expressionist. Two favourites of the anthologists, *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape*, both plays in eight scenes depicting the retrogressive position of the main character, both imaginatively framed in scenes of pictorial contrast, show the originality of O'Neill's mind

and his talent for creating unusual imagery in theatrical terms. The characters are not individuals but symbols, the action evolves not from life but from ideas, and the speech is secondary to the very striking pantomime, and to the highly emotive sound effects which are part of every production.

Literary Convention

O'Neill, concerned with the essentially racial heritage of his Emperor Jones, forgot or ignored the distinctive idiom and speech of the Negro, his natural and so often very fresh use of imagery. He resorted to certain literary conventions of uneducated speech, such as dropped consonants, substitution of d's for th's, and typical errors in usage. For instance, an early speech to ferret-eyed Smithers :

> No use'n you rakin' up ole times. What I was den is one thing. What I is now's another. You didn't let me in on yo' crooked work out o' no kind feelin's dat time. I done de dirty work fo' you—and most o' de brain work, too, fo' dat matter—and I was wu'th money to you, dat's de reason.

In the ironic bragging speech before he takes to the woods Jones anticipates many of the harangues which keep reappearing in later plays :

> Look-a-heah, white man ! Does you think I'se a natural bo'n fool ? Give me credit fo' havin' some sense, fo' Lawd's sake ! Don't you s'pose 'se looked ahead and made sho' of all de chances ? I'se gone out out in dat big forest, pretendin' to hunt, so many times dat I knows it high an' low like a book. I could go through on dem trails wid my eyes shut.

In the remaining eight scenes Jones continues a monologue that expresses O'Neill's theory about the social position of the Negro rather than suggesting the speech of the character. Even an expressionist play about a Negro would profit from the kind of dialogue found in Bradford's *Ol' Man Adam and His Chillun*, basis for Marc Connolly's *Green Pastures*, or Du Bose Heyward's *Porgy* upon which the opera was based, or in the Paul Green, *In Abraham's Bosom.*

Theatrical Speeches

There is also poetic conception in the setting of *The Hairy Ape* where the image of "the steel framework of a cage" is repeated. The heart of the drama lies in the clash of ideas symbolized in the characters. The hairy-chested Neanderthal men representing all the

"civilized white races" cramped in the dungeon of the ship are contrasted in their brute vitality with Mildred and her Aunt, bloodless figures from the privileged classes, and later with the marionette, caricatures on Fifth Avenue. The dialogue is again quite secondary.

Yank, representing the most articulate of his mates, is given to exceedingly long tirades about his place, his fury over Mildred's insults, and his seeking "to belong". The dialogue is somewhat reminiscent of Brutus Jones, with additional touches of Brooklynese —'foist'—'boids'—'woild'. Most of his speeches ring with social protest more appropriate to O'Neill than to 'The Thinker':

> De Bible, huh? De Cap'tlist class, huh? Aw nix on dat Salvation Army-Socialist bull. Git a soapbox! Hire a hall! Come and be saved, huh? Jerk us to Jesus, huh? Aw g'wan! I've listened to lots of guys like you, see. Yuh're all wrong. Wanter know what I t'ink? Yuh ain't no good for no one. Yuh're de bunk. Yuh ain't got no noive, get me? Yuh're yellow, dat's what. Yellow, dat's you. Say! What's dem slobs in de foist cabin got to do wit us? We're better men dan dey are, ain't we? Sure! One of us guys could clean up de whole mob wit one mit.

Speeches like this make good theatre because of their vitality and strength but are not particularly noteworthy as dramatic literature.

Hackneyed Speech Rhythms

O'Neill obviously worked for speech rhythms to distinguish Paddy's speech from Yank's but the idiom seems to be conventional literary Irish: "Oh, the clean skins of them, and the clear eyes, the straight backs and full chests of them? Brave men they was, and bold men surely! We'd be sailing out, bound down round the Horn maybe. We'd be making sail in the dawn, with a fair breeze, singing a chanty song wid no care to it..." The dialogue of Synge and O'Casey each so different, but so close to the idiom of an imaginative and voluble people, has made lines like those given to Paddy seem almost as hackneyed as the old Pat and Mike routine.

Theatrical Devices Overshadow Dialogue

Two other examples from *The Hairy Ape* indicate how theatrical device has overshadowed the dialogue. In Scene Four when Yank, smouldering over the recent insults and trying to understand the significance, verbalizes extensively, he is interrupted by the monosyllabic chorus of his mates—Think! —Love! —Law! —Government! —God! The tinny mechanical quality of these utterances would be more theatrically effective than significant in meaning. The puppet figures on Fifth Avenue, Frankenstein

monsters in their detached, mechanical unawareness, can be striking, but again it is the pantomime that communicates the contrast. And again, their acid remarks belong more nearly to O'Neill than to men in Prince Alberts, high hats, and spats :

> Dear Doctor Caiaphas ! He is so sincere !
>
> What was the sermon ? I dozed off.
>
> About the radicals, my dear—and the false doctrine that are being preached.
>
> We must organize a hundred per cent American bazaar
>
> And let everyone contribute one one-hundredth per cent of their income tax.

Dialogue Unequal to Situation

When *Mourning Becomes Electra* was first produced, critics exhausted superlatives but a few independent writers saw it as another magnificent aim which failed to reach its goal. And yet, in spite of its weaknesses, it remains one of the most distinguished plays by any American dramatist. One example will indicate how O'Neill failed to write dialogue equal to a situation he had created. In the scene when Mannon, just home from the war, tells Christine about his view of death, and of the life he wants before it closes, the scene is heightened because of Vinnie's awareness of her father's danger, and because of the audience's knowledge of Christine's intentions to poison her husband. Charged with horror, it is a scene which demands dialogue of the highest order. It does seem, however, that Mannon's are not the lines a man would have spoken in such circumstances. They are like lengthy, discursive parts of a letter he might have written. Mannon says to Christine, his wife :

> That's always been the Mannons' way of thinking. They went to the white meeting-house on Sabbaths and meditated on death. Life was a dying. Being born was starting to die. Death was being born... How in hell people ever got such notions ! That white meeting-house. It stuck in my mind—clean-scrubbed and white-washed—a temple of death ! But in this war I've seen too many white walls splattered with blood that counted no more than dirty water. I've seen dead men scattered about, no more important than rubbish to be got rid of. That made the white meeting-house seem meaningless—making so much solemn fuss over death !

Christine. What has this talk of death to do with me ?

> *Mannon.* Shut your eyes again. Listen and you'll know...I thought about my life—lying awake nights—and about your life. In the middle of battle I'd think maybe in a minute I'll be dead. Put my life as just me ending, that didn't appear worth a thought one way or another. But listen—me as your husband being killed that seemed queer and wrong—like something dying that had never lived. Then all the years we've been man and wife would rise up in my mind and I would try to look at them. But nothing was clear except that there'd always been some barrier between us—a wall hiding us from each other! I would try to make up my mind exactly what that wall was but I never could discover...Do you know?

At such a crucial point in the play a rehearsal of so much past history seems very much out of place, artificially holding up action that is imminent. O'Neill, by scattering attention with so much exposition, obscured the dramatic irony inherent in some of Mannon's words.

Superfluous Talk

The Iceman Cometh seems to be a series of confessions, lengthy and leisurely the most unusual one being that of Hickey who, at the end of the play, explained how he freed himself by murdering his wife. With few interruptions, it lasts for about twelve pages. This very long monologue brings to the audience the history of his delinquency and his wife's forbearance. There is also much talk in the play about the danger of pipe dreams, and the repetition of this theme at times wears a bit thin. Perhaps because of the type of characters, the lines are unusually well spiced with "hell" and "damn" and ejaculatory references to God. One example from Hickey suggests how extended these lines can be, so sadly in need of editing:

> But I didn't mean booze. I meant save you from pipe dreams. I know now, from my experience, they're the things that really poison and ruin a guy's life and keep him from finding any peace. If you knew how free and contented I feel now. I'm like a new man. And the cure for them is so damned simple, once you have the nerve. Just the old dope of honesty is the best policy—honesty with yourself, I mean. Just stop lying about yourself and kidding yourself about tomorrows. Hell, this begins to sound like a damned sermon on the way to lead the good life. Forget that part of it. It's in my blood, I guess. My old man used to whale salvation into my heinie with a birch rod. He was a preacher in

the sticks of Indiana, like I've told you. I got my knack of sales gab from him, too. He was the boy who could sell those Hoosier hayseeds building lots along the Golden Street!

Close to the Bone

Long Day's Journey Into Night, on the other hand, written before 1941, published in 1956, cuts close to the bone. Tensions frequently erupt in family arguments and when they do, the dialogue is spare and sharp, as for instance:

Jamie. Hardy only charges a dollar. That's what makes you think he's a fine doctor!

Tyrone. That's enough! You're not drunk now! There's no excuse...If you mean I can't afford one of the fine society doctors who prey on the rich summer people—

Jamie. Can't afford? You're one of the biggest property owners around here.

Tyrone. That doesn't mean I'm rich. It's all mortgaged—

Jamie. Because you always buy more instead of paying off mortgages. If Edmund was a lousy acre of land you wanted, the sky would be the limit!

Tyrone. That's a lie! And your sneers against Doctor Hardy are lies! He doesn't put on frills, or have office in a fashionable location, or drive around in an expensive automobile. That's what you pay for with those other five-dollars-to-look-at-your-tongue fellows, not their skill.

Out of her suffering Mary talks of the past. The talk is not mere factual history, but a comment on what life has done to her. Indirectly the audience learns what it needs to know through the horrible experience of this mother. Lines like the following are very different from the rhetorical outbursts which mar some of the previous plays. Mary speaks frankly to her husband about this same Dr. Hardy:

> Oh, we all realize why you like him, James. Because he's cheap! But please don't try to tell me! I know all about Doctor Hardy. Heaven knows I ought to after all these years. He's an ignorant fool! There should be a law to keep men like him from practising. He hasn't the slightest idea—When you're in agony and

> half insane, he sits and holds your hand and delivers sermons on willpower !......He deliberately humiliates you ! He makes you beg and plead ! He treats you like a criminal ! He understands nothing ! And yet it was exactly the same type of cheap quack who first gave you the medicine—and you never knew what it was until too late !...I hate doctors ! They'll do anything—anything to keep you coming to them. They'll sell their souls ! What's more, they'll sell yours, and you never know it till one day you find yourself in hell !

Disasters of an Unpoetic Age

It is obvious that when O'Neill worked from experience and observation, when he left the characters speak for themselves, and out of themselves, he wrote some of his best dialogues. When he worked on a grander scale, his handling of the spoken word was pretentious and verbose. Joseph Wood Krutch comments on the magnificence of *Mourning Becomes Electra* and its weaknesses, and relates Eugene O'Neill to the time in which he wrote :

> Here is a scenario to which the most soaring eloquence and the most profound poetry are appropriate, and if it were granted us we should be swept aloft as no Anglo-Saxon audience since Shakespeare's time has had an opportunity to be. But no modern is capable of language really worthy of O'Neill's play, and the lack of that one thing is the penalty we must pay for living in an age which is not equal to more than prose.

8

O'Neill's Symbolism

Conscious Use of Symbolism

An important aspect of O'Neill's technique is his conscious and studied use of symbolism. This does not imply that the audience is aware of this technique in an unpleasant manner. It is done with care and designed to extend the scope and meaning of the play beyond the limited boundary of straightforward realism. It is apparent in the early plays through his use of setting that will suggest the theme. In *Beyond the Horizon* he alternates the scenes—one inside and one outside scene for each act—by this device suggesting the conflict between the fixed prison and the yearning for freedom. Bearing directly on this point is his own comment on the critics:

> They have all accused me of bungling through ignorance—whereas, if I had wanted to, I could have laid the whole play in the farm interior, and made it tight as a drum *a la* Pinero. Then, too, I should imagine the symbolism I intended to convey by the alternating scenes would be apparent even from a glance at the programme.

Liberating Symbolism of Setting

This use of a symbolic setting gives him greater flexibility and increases the imaginative quality of his drama. It is a method that has been characteristic of O'Neill from the very beginning of his work. In the early one-act plays *Fog* is a typical example. The use of the fog as symbolic of a state of mind is rather trite, but serves to indicate that impatient and passionate quality of O'Neill's imagination which has made it possible for him to push his play out beyond the limitation of the boards on which it is acted. It has thus been possible for him to liberate the drama from the narrow limitations of a temporary stage tradition and give to his plays almost as much freedom and scope as was practiced by Shakespeare. This technique which is so easily acceptable to the audience and has grown familiar with his development, is a tribute to his inventive genius and his skill, for unlike Shakespeare, who could hang up a sign and call the scene a battlefield or the Forest of Arden, O'Neill

must satisfy the audience by a suggestion of reality in combination with his symbolism.

Thematic xploitation of Nature

This he does by using certain aspects of nature as a theme in such a pl .y as *Anna Christie* where "dat ole davil, sea" in combination, at times, with the fog lends a symbolic meaning to the play. Another example is *All God's Chillun Got Wings*. Here he definitely violates strict realism in order to give immediate symbolic meaning to his play. When the curtains part the scene revealed is of three narrow streets that converge, suggesting the struggle of race conflicts that were centred in this little corner of the world. This idea is intensified by the grouping of the actors. "In the street leading left, the faces are all white ; in the street leading right, all black." Next it becomes apparent that the conflict is to be limited and involves the conflict of the sexes : "On the sidewalk are eight children, four boys and four girls. Two of each sex are white, two black." By thus formalizing his set and the position of the characters, he has told the audience the theme of his story before a word is spoken. He has also generalized the particular, giving scope and significance to his drama beyond that which attaches to the individuals directly involved in the play. The movement of the people, the different quality of the laughter, and the spectacle as a whole with its attendant pantomime, typical of his method referred to above, all contribute to the meaning and the understanding of the play.

Pure Symbolism

The first act of *Marco Millions* is pure symbolism. In the prologue three great religions are represented, each being an outward symbol without inward meaning, except as a justification for such prejudices as serve the practical ends of each who professes it. This is further emphasized by the procession of the dead Queen. For the moment she represents power and the others end their conflict by becoming slaves in her train—the train of a dead Queen. The six scenes of the first act symbolize the progress of Marco Polo from the West to the East, from the world of limited, practical values to the world of eternal values, from the world of naive faith in human values to the world of skeptical philosophy and relative standards. But it marks also another progress which could not be accomplished except by the use of symbolism. As Marco goes to the East he grows up to the West. Thus there is reverse action which gives this particular act a charming complexity, and makes it an interesting study in the conflicting ideals of East and West, of youthful dreams and mature realities. It is further complicated by an ironic theme, for as Marco goes to the East to meet the great Kaan he loses gradually, under the careful tutelage of his father and his uncle, the conception of life which would make him understand.

the meaning cf life as reflected in the philosophy of Kublai. By means of a series of symbolic scenes Marco makes the transition from a sweet and earnest youth, proud of his dreams and his hopes, and genuine in his faith, to a shrewd businessman, whose values are profits, and whose ideals are mercenary. He forgets his youthful love, and by this is symbolized the loss of all that was pure and genuine in his philosophy. The locket bearing his sweetheart's picture is stained by a prostitute's kiss, and his poem, written to his sweetheart, is ground in the dust by a prostitute's heel, but not until he has denied its authorship, which is a denial of his former ideals. He ends by being a boaster, a braggart, a man who sees clearly the mote in his neighbour's eye. He has become brave and self-confident, and he has lost the power to sympathize with others ; he has lost the power to be generous ; he has lost the power to love ; he has become a blind automaton whose life is condemned to the vicious slavery of not even knowing that he doesn't know. This complex situation is made clear, and gives dramatic emphasis, by means of symbolism, a symbolism that develops keen and penetrating satire on Western ideals with special reference to the United States in the gambling twenties.

Function and Uses of Symbolism

This use of symbolism has lent a poetic quality to O'Neill's prose ; it has universalized his theme ; and it has added an emotional quality to his realism. This method has made it possible for him at any moment in his writing to depart from the orderly, logical language of prose into the psychological sequence of imaginative language. He has been able to remain true to the realism of his characters, and at the same time suggests those strange warnings, intuitions, fantastic ideas that play on the periphery of consciousness, or lie buried in the subconscious, but at times assert themselves with painful vividness. Examples of this may be found in every play. Old Cabot in *Desire Under the Elms* mixed a hard cruel sense of reality with an almost superstitious feeling for atmosphere. It seems perfectly natural to hear him say : "It's cold in this house. It's oneasy......They's thin's pokin' about in the dark—in the corners." And later he comes back to the same idea : "Even the music can't drive it out—somethin'. Ye kin feel it droppin' off the elums, climbin' up the roof, sneakin' down the chimney, pokin' in the corners ! They's no peace in houses, they's no rest livin' with folks. Somethin's always livin' with ye."

Mystical Quality

In this particular case there is added to the symbolism a quality that is almost mystical. This speech is a soliloquy and seems to be an echo to the action that is going on in the upstairs rooms of the house, where Eben and Abbie are meeting over the cradle of th-

baby that the old man believes is his own. Further discussion of this mystical use of coincidence need not be gone into. At this place is emphasized only the use of symbolism to intensify and give scope to the theme. As O Neill grew and developed as a dramatist he followed faithfully his original technique. His plays grew in scope and theme and with this growth his symbolism grew more complicated. The changes that came with maturity were changes in degree not in kind.

Imaginative Use of Symbolism

The rich experimental nature of O'Neill's work, which has given new life and fresh impetus to an American drama that was hopelessly enthralled by a fixed tradition, may be traced, in its major part, to his bold and imaginative use of symbolism. His first great success was *The Emperor Jones*, and it was his use of symbolism in setting, in action and in plot construction that stirred his audience to wonder and admiration. O'Neill had realized that modern drama need not necessarily be bound by the realistic set. Like the Elizabethans he rose above the limitation of his stage. He made his stage a servant to his art, refusing to accept the limitation imposed by tradition.

Symbolism of Masks

In *The Great God Brown* O'Neill's symbolism took the form of masks, a technique that was pushed to its utmost limits in *Lazarus Laughed*. In this play the masks are made to bear a heavy load, for each individual mask or represents both age and quality. Seven periods of life are characterized by the masks and each of these periods is represented by seven different masks of general types of character as follows : "The Simple, Ignorant ; the Happy, Eager ; the Self-Tortured, Introspective ; the Proud, Self-Reliant ; the Servile, Hypocritical ; the Revengeful, Cruel ; the Sorrowful, Resigned." Not only does this symbolism become complex in itself, but as the play develops it is apparent that the combination of these various types and others that follow creates intricate group symbols that offer an interpretation of life-forces at war in the history of the entire Western culture. The play becomes a symbolic interpretation of life in words, in action, in pictorial effect and in pantomime. This marks the extreme of O'Neill's symbolism, and perhaps it indicates the use of symbols beyond their effectiveness for drama. If the audience is to be considered, it seems clear that some explanation beyond that of the play itself would be necessary.

Psychological Symbolism

For O'Neill this experiment may have been imperative to his own development. It taught him the value of the mask as well as its limitation. It should be remembered, however, that time and

familiarity may still make *Lazarus Laughed* a successful stage play. For the author it was a step in the direction of a new type of symbolism—that of the aside in *Strange Interlude*. In this play it is again the author's attempt to push back the boundaries of the stage world that gives rise to this type of symbolism. The audience is tacitly required to forget that thoughts are not spoken aloud in the presence of others, in order that it may enter more fully into the psychological analysis of the characters on the stage. His technique thus becomes a means by which he reveals the strange conflict between what man is in reality and what he is in relation to the social pattern of his life.

Symbolic Interpretation of Human Struggle

Following *Strange Interlude* came *Dynamo*. Again he used the 'aside' technique to give a symbolic interpretation of man's age-long struggle to find a meaning to life— a meaning to the meaningless. His own account of what he meant the play to be is evidence to the point of symbolism. He wrote of *Dynamo* that the play is a "Symbolical and factual biography of what is happening in a large section of the American (and not only American) soul right now. It is really the first play of a trilogy that will dig at the roots of the sickness of to-day as I feel it—the death of an old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfying new one for the surviving primitive religious instinct to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort its fears of death with." His use of "symbolical and factual" indicates the combination that fits every play. Always there is this symbolism and always the symbolism is used to universalize the theme, to make it important for the race—even mankind—as well as specifically pointed for the characters in the action of the play. This may be subtly and almost abstractly represented, as by Dion's mask, or crudely and too obviously done in the case of the money thrown into the sea in *The Rope*.

Value of Symbols

It is the symbol that matters in an O'Neill play, because he has something more to say than can be said in plain unshaded words. Directly following the passage quoted above are these words:

> It seems to me that anyone trying to do big work nowadays must have this big subject behind all the little subjects of his plays or novels, or he is simply scribbling around on the surface of things and has no more real status than a parlour entertainer.

The "big subject" of man's relation to the apparently meaningless world that modern science has revealed has always been O'Neill's problem.

The Unreal Reality

It must not be inferred from this discussion of O'Neill's use of symbolism that he deprecates the drama which aims at and achieves success in straight realism. He lays down no inflexible dogma, but for himself he needs the wider field and the deeper, often dimly felt meanings that some form of symbolism will give. This is but further evidence of what the drama as an art form means to O'Neill. The drama to him is a powerful medium through which the dark surging of man's inner life sheds for a moment its unreal mask. His plays reveal the unreal reality, the concealed truth ; they give form and substance to the dream ; they lend to that airy nothing which is in reality everything, a local habitation and a name.

9

O'Neill's Mysticism

Interpreting Life in Terms of Lives

O'Neill was essentially a realist, but almost all his plays are suffused with the radiant glow of mystic symbolism. When his critics started heaping upon him such diverse and conflicting labels as a "sordid Realist", a "grim, primitive Naturalist", a "lying Moral Romanticist", and an "immoral violent Expressionist", he had to come out with a clarification of his dramatic aims and practice. In a letter written to Arthur Hobson Quinn, he observed :

> But where I feel myself most neglected is just where I set most store by myself—as a bit of a poet who has laboured with the spoken word to evolve original rhythms of beauty where apparently isn't—'Jones', 'Ape', 'God's Chillun',, 'Desire' etc.—and to see the transfiguring nobility of tragedy in as near the Greek sense as one can grasp it, in seemingly the most ignoble, debased lives. And just here is where I am a most confirmed mystic, too, for I'm always trying to interpret Life in terms of lives. never just lives in terms of character. I'm always acutely conscious of the Force behind—(Fate, God, our biological past creating our present, whatever one calls it—Mystery, certainly)-- and of the one eternal tragedy of Man in his glorious, self-destructive struggle to make the Force express him instead of being, as an animal is, an infinitesimal incident in its expression. And my profound conviction is that this is the only subject worth writing about and that it is possible —or can be—to develop a tragic expression in terms of transfigured modern values and symbols in the theatre which may to some degree bring home to members of a modern audience their ennobling identity with the tragic figures on the stage. Of course, this is very much of a dream, but where the theatre is concerned, one must have a dream, and the Greek dream in tragedy is the noblest ever !

Aspiring Towards the Light

If O'Neill is primarily a poet, he is a playwright, too, but he is a great dramatist because he is more than a dramatist. His own most distinct successes in the theatre, like "Anna Christie", interest him least, and, while the theatre is in his blood, he will be finally estimated not by his stage devices, like the four-roomed cottage in "Desire Under the Elms", but by his profound imaginative interpretation of aspiring humanity, struggling upward, even through sin and shame, towards the light.

The Dramatic Conflict

O'Neill's art is progressive, within itself and as part of the dramatic history of America. Essentially, drama is a celebration of the individual in conflict with something - Fate, circumstance, moral and social law—which hampers to crush him. In the early nineteenth century, the authors of "The Gladiator" or "Metamora" celebrated the hero who rebelled against political tyranny. In the latter part of the century the conflict became frequently economic, though American playwrights did not use this theme as often as their European rivals. With the twentieth century, political and economic rights having been secured, the dramatists, under the leadership of William Vaughan Moody, became concerned with the problem of the individual's right to self-expression, and the sanctity of rebellion was taught, even, as in "The Masque of Judgment", to the overthrow of God himself. Many significant plays, like "The Piper", "Kindling", "The Inheritors", or "A Man's World" are founded on a situation in which the hero or heroine is brought into conflict with the selfishness, the indifference, or the stratification of the life around him.

The Creative Force Should Express Man

Eugene O'Neill certainly marks the next step forward. The individual no longer rebels against God or Fate for the right to express himself. He demands something more. The Creative Force, as part of its responsibility for the creation of the individual, must express him. O'Neill himself indicates the essential dignity of his art. Whatever his characters may attempt, success or failure means little, but the struggle was worthwhile. Misguided, blundering, The Hairy Ape was struggling for his place in creation, and the final words of the play, "The Hairy Ape perhaps at last belongs" are clear. Ephraim Cabot in "Desire" talks to God as a task-master in whose very "hardness" he rejoices. The New Englander of Cabot's type gloried in an adversary worthy of his steel. But the representation of the Force of life is not always so concrete as in "Desire". In "The Great God Brown", it manifests itself in at least four of the main characters : Dion Anthony, the painter, who represents the creative spirit of art ; William Brown, the successful

man of to-day ; Margaret, the normal woman : Cybel, the prostitute —all representing the eternal creative instinct in different phases. The struggle here is expressed symbolically, and the interpretation of the varying changes of personality in the characters is, on the stage, made quicker of appeal through the use of masks. After all, the test of drama is the stage production, and that the audience receives a dramatic impression is apparent. For O'Neill with all his symbolism never fails to create live people, and probably three-fourths of the audience of "The Great God Brown" are held by the human struggle without seeing the symbolism at all. They see the tragedy in the dying words of Dion and of Brown, both begging for the belief which the paganism of one and the materialism of the other had crushed out of their lives And this is really all O'Neill expects them to see. He is not proposing any solution of this eternal problem, as he proposed no solution in *Anna Christie* or *The Hairy Ape*. Back of the human lives he treats he sees a force so infinitely greater than any character that man cannot estimate it, but can only feel, dimly or ecstatically, the power he can but vaguely interpret. There it is—"the glory and the dream".

Towards Spiritual Growth

O'Neill is not only a dramatic poet, but also a mystic. Generations of Celtic ancestry flower in him, just as generations of the Puritan mystic flowered in Hawthorne and Emerson. In him the Celtic nature, with its intimate relations with the past, catches a gleam now and then of the dim regions where God brought into being a nobler form of life than had before existed. Because of this clutch of the primitive which the Celt as the oldest of the Indo-European races has guarded as its birthright, O'Neill goes down into the depths of human life to study apparently degraded forms. His audiences gasp often, comprehend sometimes, but always apprehend at least that a soul is speaking to them who has something important to say. O'Neill's Celtic ancestry, moreover, leads him to symbolism. The race, in its painting, its poetry, its religion, thinks in symbols, knowing that mysticism has to be tied down to reality by some concrete expression. The procession on Fifth Avenue in *The Hairy Ape* bothered a great many. It appeared to them out of the picture of realistic life on which the rest of the plays seemed to be based. To O'Neill it was only an experiment, differing not in kind, but in degree, for the entire play was a symbolic picture of the struggle upward of physical strength towards a spiritual growth.

American Roots

O'Neill declines to be limited in his theme or locality. His roots are in America, often in the New England where he lived so long and which he understands so well, from its farms to its police courts, which as a reporter had to frequent. He can describe the decadent aristocracy of the small town in New England as in "The First Man" as realistically as Mary Wilkins Freeman or Alice Brown, but he is

really not concerned with their limitations except as background. In "The Fountain" the elixir of eternal youth attracts him as a romantic theme just as it attracted Hawthorne in "Doctor Grimshawe's Secret".

The Water of Eternal Life

It is not only in his choice of such a theme as the water of eternal life that he resembles Hawthorne. In that striking passage in Emerson's Journals in which he describes Hawthorne's burial, the Concord philosopher tells us : "Clarke in the church said that Hawthorne had done more justice than any other to the shades of life, shown a sympathy with the crime in our nature and, like Jesus, was the friend of sinners." Discussion raged at one time over the problem of the apparent contradiction between Hawthorne's retired life at Salem, Lenox, or Concord and his deep knowledge of the effects of sin and even crime upon the consciences of his characters. No such problem occurs in the case of O'Neill. His wanderings in search of adventure and his experience as a reporter have both brought him into contact with the seamy side of human nature. But the important point does not lie in a discussion of their material. The significant fact remains that twice during America's literary history a poet used the medium of prose to reveal the beauty that lies in the human soul, even though it has gone through the crucible of temptation and sin, to fuse away the dross of life. To Hawthorne, Hester Prynne and Donatello were finer clay than if adultery and murder had not stained them, because through suffering they won a character not theirs before. Anna Christie, purified from her sordid past by the cleansing power of the "Old davil sea" ; Dion Anthony, hiding his longing to create under the mask of the sensualist, are expressions of the same sympathy with sinners.

The Saving Grace

It is encouraging that when an artist like O'Neill resolutely sets his face against the picturing of the merely little things of life he should have won the wide recognition he enjoys. He paints little souls and big souls, but he never consciously gives us the unimportant or the mean. We may not like all of his characters, we may even shudder at them, as we do at the Emperor Jones himself, but O'Neill found in that thief and murderer a spark that distinguished him from all the natives of that imaginary island. We agree with the epitaph of Smithers the half-caste — " 'E's a better man than the lot o' you put together." O'Neill found that spark, of course, because he put it there. Even in the most degraded man, O'Neill recognizes the saving grace that comes from his divine origin.

10

O' Neill as a Poet of the Theatre

Failure of Language

The recurrent critical complaint about Eugene O'Neill is the failure of his language to equal the intensity or excitement of his action or situations. Even J. W. Krutch called *Mourning Becomes Electra* a "scenario" and declared that no modern writer was "capable of language really worthy of O'Neill's play". But when we look deeply into the nature of language in O'Neill's plays, we realize that O'Neill has a unique combination of skill and vision : born and raised in the theatre he was well-versed in the secrets of stage effect ; years of travel and experience gave him a sense of the mystery of life which prevented him from using his skill for effect alone.

Poetic Symbols

O'Neill's earliest vignettes of the sailor's life suggest how his skill is to serve the purposes of his vision. His father, James O'Neill, who destroyed his own artistic career by yielding to his audience's thirst for sensation, would have been baffled by such a play as "Bound East for Cardiff". although the violent action of "Ile" would have comforted him. *Bound East for Cardiff*, however, is a more direct statement of O'Neill's vision ; the sailor, dying against a background of his quarrelling, disinterested mates, is an image of the loneliness and frustration of man. The playwright's early choice of the sea or the farm as his setting is a recognition of their symbolic, as well as their realistic value : life on shipboard as the world in miniature, the farm juxtaposing the order of nature and the disorder of man.

Acute Sense of Organic Form

In his non-realistic as well as his realistic plays, O'Neill demonstrates the acute sense of organic form which was to make him a leader of American expressionism. The structure of the play, the pattern of the action, even the shaping of the dialogue always follow a strict design, usually one devised for that particular play. The alternating settings of *Beyond the Horizon*, shifting from the

open road to the farmhouse interior, parallel the choices which confront the two brothers in the action. The fixed non-realistic nature of the setting in *All God's Chillun Got Wings* creates a dramatic symbol of the forces opposed to the self-realization of the hero and the heroine. In *Mourning Becomes Electra* the completely realistic setting is also completely symbolic. A part of the action takes place before the front of a carefully reproduced New England mansion of the "Greek Revival" period. Since the plot revives a Greek myth, and since Greek tragedies were generally performed in the open area before a pillared temple-like structure, this setting aids in developing more than the literal meaning of the action.

Patterning of Characters

In characterization, too, O'Neill prefers to follow a pattern. His characters are not necessarily stereotypes, but he is at some pains from early in his career to make it apparent that each is but an instrument in the revelation of his theme. At first he frequently describes the "humour" or manner of a character by the figurative suggestion of a mask: "Mrs. Mayo's face has...become a weak mask wearing a helpless, doleful expression of being constantly on the verge of comfortless tears." Later, in *The Great God Brown*, each character is equipped with an actual mask which he dons or doffs to indicate his inner nature, his attitude and his emotion. Aware that this restoration of a classical stage property called attention to itself and away from the play as a whole, O'Neill made a further modification. In *Mourning Becomes Electra* where the Greek myth suggested the employment of actual masks, the realism of the setting forced a compromise. The Mannons, in repose, all have mask-like faces, resembling the mask-like portraits on the walls of their library. Since the Mannons are seldom in repose, the effect is more potential than actual, but it underlies the action as a symbol of the chain of evil that binds them together.

Poetry of the Theatre

The use of the material of the theatre, settings and make-up and action, on several levels achieves an effect similar to the effect of poetic language in the older drama, and accounts for the impact of much of O'Neill's work, in spite of the lack of poetic language in his dialogue. *Desire Under the Elms* is a singularly effective example of the use of the "poetry of the theatre". Its theme is variations on the first word of the title. Abbie Putnam, the young wife, desires a home, security; Simeon and Peter, the older sons, desire freedom from the hard labour of a New England rock-bound farm; Eben, the youngest son, desires to possess what was his mother's (with the obvious Freudian implication); and Old Ephraim, the father, desires to escape from his tragic sense of aloneness by possessing the farm he has made out of impossible land, since human love fails him in each of his wives and each of his sons.

Life Without Foundation

Life on the farm has been a theatrical cliche for a hundred years exploited by playwrights for sentimentality, low humour, and melodrama. What O'Neill has done is to examine the motive behind the affection for the Old Homestead—the desire to possess—and he equates this desire with the animal desire to possess other things. The romance is gone when the motive is revealed. But O'Neill is making a general, or universal, statement about life. The desire to possess grows out of a feeling of instability or insecurity. Thus his vision is of a life without foundation, without creeds or beliefs, struggling for a symbol of security, a few rocky acres of a New England farmstead.

Poetical Use of the Elements of Theatre

The abstract idea of desire is of course made concrete by the action, but the poetical use of the elements of the theatre intensifies the concept. Over the farmhouse stand two elms bending heavily upon the roof. They are like exhausted women resting their sagging breasts and hands and hair on its roof, and when it rains their tears trickle down monotonously and rot the shingles. In the opening scene of the second act, the manner of the characters as they move heavily through the oppressive heat, their actions, carefully guided by the author, even their voices, give the thematic word an almost physical presence. The disappearing wall of the farmhouse, revealing several rooms at once, is a common device of nineteenth-century melodrama. Here, however, it is not merely spectacular or sensational. The multiple playing areas permit O'Neill to create visual ironies and reveal psychological relationships within the conventions of the realistic theatre.

11

O'Neill's Pessimism

View of Life

It is a commonplace in O'Neill criticism to call him a pessimist, and by some strange process of reasoning to imply that pessimism is to be condemned in art as well as in life. The following statement by Carl Van Doren is a restrained expression of a point of view that has been repeated almost endlessly : "O'Neill's view of life, it now seems clear, is of something which unaccountably frustrates the individual spirit. The fault may lie in life itself, or it may lie in the insufficiency of given individuals ; O'Neill as a playwright does not decide which but proceeds to create dumb, tortured persons who come in the end to worse than naught." While Van Doren is careful not to pass an ethical judgment, others have implied that since O'Neill is a pessimist, he is therefore false to the truth of life.

Two Types of Pessimism

Before his position as a pessimist is analyzed, it may be well to distinguish between two types of pessimism that have flourished in the literature of the last half-century. The one type sees the universe as fundamentally unfavourable to man, and at times even ruled by a conscious power bent on evil. This type of pessimism stems from Schopenhauer, Von Hartmann and the early nineteenth-century pessimists. In so far as the followers of this school, such as Andreyev and Hardy, actually imply a conscious force of evil, they are still children of the anthropomorphic world against which they so passionately rebelled. They came to look upon the old faiths as false dreams, false beliefs to be abandoned by intelligent men, but in their art they still were unable to view man in the light of an animal in a world of physical forces, but they must continue to treat him against the background of a purposeful universe. Theirs is a queer combination of medieval and modern. In the *Life of Man* Andreyev is concerned with man and eternity, writing, "Coming from the night he will return to the night. Bereft of thought, bereft of feeling, unknown to all, he will perish utterly, vanishing without trace into infinity." This may be true, but from a realistic point of view, all that can be said is, "What of it ?" The whole of Andreyev's position as a pessimist may be summarized in the following quotation from the *Life of Man* :

> Look and listen, ye who have come hither for mirth and laughter. Lo, there will pass before you all the life of Man, with its dark beginning and its dark end. Hitherto non-existent, mysteriously hidden in infinite time, without thought or feeling, utterly unknown, he will mysteriously break through the barriers of non-existence and with a cry will announce the beginning of his brief life. In the night of non-existence will blaze up a candle, lighted by an unseen hand. This is the life of Man. Behold its flame. It is the life of Man. Irresistibly dragged on by time, he will tread inevitably all the steps of human life, upward to its climax and downward to its end. Limited in vision, he will not see the step to which his unsure foot is already raising him. Limited in knowledge, he will never know what the coming day or hour or moment is bringing to him. And in his blind ignorance, worn by apprehension, harassed by hopes and fears, he will complete submissively the iron round of destiny.

O'Neill's Pessimism Born of Man

The pessimism of Andreyev is, typical of modern literature, but not of O'Neill. O'Neill is not concerned about man's ultimate destiny, he is not disturbed by the fact that man and all his works may some day drift into the darkness of space a frozen and unseen monument to the vagaries of the creative process. His pessimism is of man in this world in which he must live and justify himself if life is to have a meaning. His pessimism is born of man, not of God or the Universe. It is a pessimism that has in it some gleam of hope, for it holds that man's greatest tragedies are of his own making, and thus it is fair presumption to hope that man may unmake them. Not that O'Neill says that he will do so ; he may recognize the persistence of man's hopeless hope, but even granting all that, there is still a vast difference between the position of O'Neill and that of Schopenhauer.

Definition of Pessimism

In discussing this phase of O'Neill's pessimism there is a remark from Galsworthy on the subject that may help to make the definition of pessimism as it applies to the subject more clear and understandable. Galsworthy writes :

> As a man lives and thinks, so will he write. But it is certain, that to the making of good drama, as to the practice of every other art, there must be brought an almost passionate love of discipline, a white-heat of self-respect, a desire to make the truest, fairest, best thing in one's power ; and that to these must be added an eye that does not flinch. Such qualities alone will bring to a

drama the selfless character which soaks it with inevitability. The word 'pessimist' is frequently applied to the few dramatists who have been content to work in this way. It has been applied, among others, to Euripides, to Shakespeare, to Ibsen; it will be applied to many in the future. Nothing, however, is more dubious than the way in which these two words 'pessimist' and 'optimist' are used, for the optimist appears to be he who cannot bear the world as it is, and is forced by his nature to picture it as it ought to be, and the pessimist one who cannot only bear the world as it is, but loves it well enough to draw it faithfully. The true lover of the human race is surely he who can put up with it in all its forms, in vice as well as in virtue, in defeat no less than in victory; the true seer he who sees not only joy but sorrow, the true painter of human life one who blinks nothing. It may be that he is also, incidentally, its true benefactor.

Not a Gloomy Pessimist

This type of pessimism is freed from the tyranny of absolute laws and may lead man to understand that if he is to be happy in this life, he must reconcile himself to its inevitable limitations. He must realize that it is his show. He is director and actor, and if the performance is rotten he can't blame God or any other power outside himself. Nor can he be so irrational as to ask for better materials than life itself has offered him. And this may be taken to be a measure of O'Neill's pessimism. He does not hold that because we have lost our medieval heritage. of an anthropomorphic God with a Hell beneath us and a Heaven above that life is therefore and forever a hopeless tragedy. The deep and all-obliterating gloom that characterizes such a poet as James Thomson has no parallel in O'Neill. When Thomson discovered that he had been tricked into a false faith in the days of his youth, he assumed that nothing but despair could follow. The same is true of Hardy's reaction, when he discovered that "What is good for God's gardener is not good for God's birds." This fact made him sure that "Happiness is but an occasional episode in a general drama of pain." And so it was with most of the modern realists. They escaped from one doom only to make themselves another even more terrible than its predecessor. To O'Neill belongs the credit of seeing life more clearly and firmly than did many of those who were his spiritual forefathers. He deals with man's life here and now. Within the limits of this world he finds his justification for life.

A Lover of Life

But as he looks about him in the world and finds that man has striven artfully and savagely to deprive himself of such transitory happiness as is actually possible to life, surely he cannot be held

responsible for that, and, on the basis of his interpretation of this truth, be condemned as a pessimist who has no hope for man. Once in answer to the question would he ever write about happiness, he answered :

> Sure I'll write about happiness if I can happen to meet up with that luxury, and find it sufficiently dramatic and in harmony with any deep rhythm in life. But happiness is a word. What does it mean ? Exaltation, an intensified feeling of the significant worth of man's being and becoming ? Well, if it means that—and not a mere smirking contentment with one's lot—I know there is more of it in one real tragedy than in all the happy-ending plays ever written...It's mere present-day judgment to think of tragedy as unhappy ! The Greeks and the Elizabethans knew better. They felt the tremendous lift to it. It roused them spiritually to a deeper understanding of life. Through it they found release from the petty considerations of everyday existence. They saw their lives ennobled by it. A work of art is always happy ; all else is unhappy... ...I don't love life because it's pretty. Prettiness is only clothes-deep. I am a truer lover than that. I love it naked. There is beauty to me even in its ugliness.

And if more than this were needed, Barret H. Clark's own statement which follows the quotation adds the needed touch. He writes :

> I called O'Neill an optimist before I had read these words, and by that I meant that he was a militant apostle of life with a capital L. He dares look upon it without passing judgment ; he lays it bare to the best of his ability as an artist and poet.

Being and Becoming

Man's "being and becoming" is the essence of O'Neill's pessimism, and this is a theme that from one point of view may be called a kind of optimism. One would not wish to confuse the issue or to make the meaning of the two words in question any more shadowy or meaningless than they already are. It serves the understanding of O'Neill better to call him a pessimist, but with a difference. He is a pessimist who loves life ; one whose love goes so deep that he cannot remain supine and unmoved by its present failure blocking its potential happiness. He loves life well enough to condemn those who shun it in fear and trembling, and to urge those who can face its reality to make the most of it.

Defiant Characters

The characters of his plays bear out this interpretation of his philosophy of life. Whatever else may be said of them, they do no

cringe. They are above all else courageous and defiant. It is this quality in them which gives exhilaration to the grimmest tragedy of O'Neill. They may and they do go down to defeat and death, but they never ask to be forgiven. They are game to the end. Sometimes they realize the reason for their failure, as did Ponce de Leon, but they always accept it bravely. If O'Neill has given us a true picture of the world of man, then in spite of all its disaster it is still a good world in which to live, for it is peopled with men and women in whom the undying fire of rebellion is a living flame, and as long as that is true there is still hope that something may yet happen to solve the riddle of man's inherent tragedy before that final sunset and the eternal darkness settle over the world.

Indomitable Will-to-Life

There is the fire of an indomitable will-to-life in the world of O'Neill. To grasp its full significance one must be ready to look upon life as an adventure in a grim world, or the result will be failure to comprehend his meaning. The person whose scope of criticism is limited by his ability to add up the number of times O'Neill writes "damn", or the numbers of murders committed in the sum of his works, or the number of neurotic characters he introduces, may arrive at certain facts interesting in themselves, but surely a trifle strange as a measure of the artist's worth. Arithmetic must forever remain a distant cousin of the true critic.

An Impoverished World

T. K. Whipple finds O'Neill's world as "thoroughly hostile to human life". He writes :

> To read O'Neill, then, or to witness his plays is to live temporarily in an intense but a simplified and impoverished world, a world narrow in range and meagre in substance. Scanty to begin with, this world has been further stripped and denuded by its creator's preoccupation with primal forces only. And not only is it so to speak an emaciated skeleton world, but also one which by subordinating man and making him the helpless victim of larger forces, and by depicting him as always undergoing a spiritual defeat, is thoroughly hostile to human life. In fact, in spite of the violent forms in which life manifests itself, the ruling principle of his world is death, not life. It crushes and kills.

Life : Its Own Reason For Being

If one neglects the real spirit of O'Neill's tragedies then this judgment of his world might be true, but O'Neill has a great deal more to say than Whipple has been able to concede. In order to understand and appreciate the life force of O'Neill's world it must be remembered that he does not think that death means the negation

of living, or that the fear of death should destroy the value of life. He says yea to death with the same enthusiasm that he greets life. He does not bow before any aspect of life in humility, for life to him is its own reason, for being and not the servant of supernatural forces.

Boldly Defiant Protagonists

The men and women that move in the world of O'Neill's are boldly defiant. They realize defeat, but scorn it—even cursing it. This world of O'Neill is a world of bitter struggle and tragic lives, but to those who accept its reality it is a world rich in experience, adventure and daring, where men and women demand that life give them some positive value. In spite of destruction which stalks on every highway in the world of O'Neill, as it does also in the world of the Greek tragedy, it is still a good world to live in, because it is a world where brave, charming, complex and interesting men and women are present at every turn. They are in a sense sick, that is, they are not fat, happy, contented and resigned to a gospel of prosperity and good business opportunities. By being sick is meant that they are civilized. They have awakened to the realization of what it means to be human. They are aware that to be human means to desire from life more than food, clothing and shelter. They yearn for happiness as the ultimate good, and when their struggle nears the end they are more defiant than submissive. Living in the world of O'Neill is not an easy task, but it is interesting. It is a world that demands courage, that is intense with experience, and that above all is not supine. It is a world in which we are not allowed to "delude ourselves with some tawdry substitute". To O'Neill "Life doesn't end. One experience is but the birth of another."

Idealistic, Sensitive Rebels

O'Neill's characters are all of one family in that they are all rebels against the world in which they live. They are all nervous, high-strung, impetuous, and they are also determined that life shall give them more than it is willing to give. In this sense they are idealists, for they are not reconciled to the inevitable limitations of their world. In the end they discover their limitations, and accept their doom, but not quietly or without protest. Like Lavinia they may retire behind the closed doors and barred windows, but they will not do it humbly. They protest even after they have realized the futility of the struggle. This may or may not be the way of wisdom, and surely it is not the way of peace and resignation. There is no promise of a sunrise after the shadows and storms of night have passed in the world of O'Neill. He does not open a haven to the weary and heavy-laden, but for those to whom there is charm and beauty in the turbulence of life itself, this world of O'Neill is interesting and is intense. There is in it the Nietzschean will to power—the glorification of life.

12

O'Neill's Tragic Vision

Relation Between Men and God

O'Neill, in a remark to J. W. Krutch, once pointed out the fundamental difference between himself and the majority of modern dramatists : "Most modern plays are concerned with the relation between man and man, but that does not interest me at all. I am interested only in the relation between man and God." This means that O'Neill thought of himself as primarily a religious playwright; not, of course, in the strict sense with which such a designation can be bestowed on Eliot or Claudel—O'Neill never demonstrates the salvation of any creed—but in the wide sense, that what chiefly concerns him are ultimate, transcendental phenomena.

Influence of Nietzsche and Greek Tragedy

O'Neill's view of life and of tragedy bears an unmistakable kinship with Nietzsche's. Undoubtedly he was to some extent influenced by Nietzsche's thinking, but it is more meaningful to see the similarity in their ideas as a manifestation of a basic spiritual affinity. To Nietzsche, who in this respect of course adheres to a long and well established tradition, Greek tragedy meant the unsurpassed example of art. As we shall see, O'Neill shared this view. Enacted in theatres that were also temples, the Attic tragedies had a religious spirit which the dramatist found completely lacking in modern life. (One of the notes for *Lazarus Laughed* reads : "What did the Greeks have that we haven't got ? First, faith in their own lives as symbols of life ! Hence, faith in their own courage. Hence, faith in their own ability. Hence, faith in the nobility of Fate. Hence, in a word—True Faith !") "If in three or four years I'm able to read Greek tragedy in the original and enjoy it", he once told a friend, "I'll have made a grand refuge for my soul to dive deeply and coolly into at moments when modern life—and drama—became too damn humid and shallow to be borne", wrote O'Neill to M. Komroff in 1926. O'Neill rarely felt that he fully belonged to life and he probably never felt himself as part of *modern* life. The evolution he believed in was of the crayfish variety : a regressive decline from the glory that was Greek to the empty values of contemporary life. To recreate the Greek spirit in modern life was the goal he set for himself both as a playwright and as a man. The mystical, Dionysian experience of being, not an individual, but part

of the Life Force, which Nietzsche found communicated in the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles, O'Neill hoped to impart, through his plays, to a modern audience. "What has influenced my plays the most", he stated in 1929, "is my knowledge of the drama of all time—particularly Greek tragedy."

No Elaborate Theory of Tragedy

Like most modern dramatists—Ibsen, Strindberg, Synge, Chekhov, to mention the ones that can lay the greatest claim to having written modern tragedies and that have at the same time influenced O'Neill - he never evolved any elaborate theory of tragedy. Yet in interviews and letters he occasionally expressed his tragic vision—rather than his view of tragedy. Thus, in a letter to the *New York Tribune* of Feb. 13, 1921, he declared that to him "the tragic alone" had "that significant beauty which is truth. It is the meaning of life—and the hope." The most complete formulation of his tragic vision he gave in an interview a year later :

> People talk of the 'tragedy' in them (my plays), and call it 'sordid', 'depressing', 'pessimistic'—the words usually applied to anything of a tragic nature. But tragedy, I think, has the meaning the Greeks gave it. To them it brought exaltation, an urge toward life and ever more life. It roused them to deeper spiritual understandings and released them from the petty greeds of everyday existence. When they saw a tragedy on the stage they felt their own hopeless hopes ennobled in art.... any victory we *may* win is never the one we dreamed of winning. The point is that life in itself is nothing. It is the *dream* that keeps us fighting, willing living! Achievement in the narrow sense of possession, is a stale finale. The dreams that can be completely realized are not worth dreaming. The higher the dream, the more impossible it is to realize it fully. But you would not say, since this is true, that we should dream only of easily attained ideals. A man wills his own defeat when he pursues the unattainable. But his *struggle* is his success ! He is an example of the spiritual significance which life attains when it aims high enough, when the individual fights all the hostile forces within and without himself to achieve a future of nobler values......Such a figure is necessarily tragic. But to me he is not depressing ; he is exhilarating ! He may be a failure in our materialistic sense. His treasures are in other kingdoms. Yet isn't he the most inspiring of all successes ?

The Higher Optimism of Tragedy

O'Neill firmly believed that true tragedy expresses a "higher optimism". In a letter to A. H. Quinn, he declared it his ambition

"to see the transfiguring nobility of tragedy, in as near the Greek sense as one can grasp it, in seemingly the most ignoble, debased lives. And just here is where I am a most confirmed mystic, too, for I'm always trying to interpret Life in terms of lives, never just lives in terms of character. I'm always acutely conscious of the Force behind—Fate, God, our biological past creating our present whatever one calls it—Mystery certainly—and of the one eternal tragedy of Man in his glorious, self-destructive struggle to make the Force express him instead of being, as an animal is, an infinitesimal incident in its expression. And my profound conviction is that this is the only subject worth writing about and that it is possible—or can be – to develop a tragic expression in terms of transfigured modern values and symbols in the theatre which may to some degree bring home to members of a modern audience their ennobling identity with the tragic figures on the stage. Of course, this is very much of a dream, but where the theatre is concerned, one must have a dream, and the Greek dream in tragedy is the noblest ever !"

Man's Self-Destructive Struggle

That O'Neill applied the "glorious, self-destructive struggle" to himself appears from a letter, in which he describes himself—he is commenting on the playwright rather than the man—as an unbent Prometheus, plucked by the vultures of self-criticism :

> My vultures are still flapping around, thank God, hungry and undismayed ; and I am very proud of them for they are my test and my self-justification. I would feel a success and a total loss if they should ever desert me to gorge themselves fat and comforted on what the newspaper boys naively call fame. But luckily they are birds that fly from the great dark behind and inside and not from the bright lights without. Each visit they wax stronger and more pitiless—which is, naturally a matter of boast between them and me !—and I look forward to some last visit when their wings will blot out the sky and they'll wrench the last of my liver out ; and then I predict they'll turn out to be angels of some God or other who have given me in exchange the germ of a soul.

Spiritual Nobility

This consistency of these statements indicates a certain permanence in the author's views, a deeply rooted tragic vision which, as far as we can judge, the writer adhered to throughout his life. Its essence is found in the postulate that the goal of life is to acquire spiritual nobility. Few men attain this goal, and therefore life on the whole is both sad and repulsive. The tragic hero, by contrast, possesses such spiritual nobility or comes at least

to possess it at the time of his undoing. He is therefore only seemingly defeated ; spiritually he is triumphant. His development is a high example set before us, and tragedy, by revealing man's power to change himself for the better, is in a deep sense highly optimistic, exulting rather than depressing. Since precisely those heroes who harbour the highest dreams and therefore have to struggle the hardest to make them come true are the most exulting, we arrive at the paradoxical conclusion that the most "optimistic" tragedies are the ones in which fate seems most inexorable.

The Meaning of Fate

This brings us to the important question of what place fate holds in O'Neill's conception of life. It is not difficult to find, fatalistic statements in the plays ; for example : "It ain't your fault, and it ain't mine, and it ain't his neither. We're all poor nuts, and things happen, and we must get mixed in wrong, that's all (*Anna Christie*)." Or. "Wer'e never free—except to do what we have to do (*All God's Chillun Got Wings*)." Or, "None of us can help the things life has done to us. They're done before you realize it, and once they're done they make you do other things until at last everything comes between you and what you'd like to be, and you've lost your true self forever (*Long Day's Journey Into Night*)." We can, of course, object to an equation of O'Neill's views with those of his characters. But this objection is of little consequence, since we find the author expressing himself in much the same vein outside the plays. Thus, in a letter to Agnes Boulton, probably written in 1928, he voices the same view as Anna Christie and Mary Tyrone in the preceding quotations :

> I am not blaming you. I have been (to blame) as much as you, perhaps more so. Or rather, neither of us is to blame. It is life which made us what we are...it is perhaps not in the nature of living life itself that fine beautiful things may exist for any great length of time, that human beings are fated to destroy just that in each other which constitutes their mutual happiness. Fits of cosmic Irish melancholia, I guess !

Future of Nobler Values

Eugene O'Neill (Jr.), who shared his father's enthusiasm for Greek drama and was an outstanding classicist, has declared that "the Greek tragedies, the concept of fate in the Greek sense, had a tremendous influence" on his father. And in the 1946 *The Iceman Cometh* interview O'Neill publicly voiced his fatalism : "It's struck me as time goes on, how something funny, even farcical, can suddenly without any apparent reason, break up into something gloomy and tragic...A sort of unfair *non sequitur*, as though events, as though life, were being manipulated just to confuse us." These remarks reveal that O'Neill could experience life itself as hostile to man, as a malign fate thwarting his hopes and desires. The majority

of men, he indicated, adjust to life as it is satisfied with what is little more than a vegetative existence. The noble spirit, however, can never do this. He must fight it at every turn and suffer greatly in the process in the hope that by this struggle a better kind of life, "a future of nobler values", may dawn.

Deep-Rooted Skepticism

O'Neill's deeply rooted skepticism of all outward success and, conversely, enthusiastic acceptance of resistance should be seen in relation to fate of his father. James O'Neill was an outstanding Shakespearean actor when, allured by the easy success of melodramatic pieces, he gave up serious acting and devoted himself especially to one part—that of Edmond Dantes in *Monte Cristo*—which he played season after season and which turned him into a wealthy though embittered man. To his world while losing one's soul—so much so, that this was to be one of the dominant themes in O'Neill's plays "My father's last words", the dramatist wrote to Tyler in 1920, "are written indelibly seared on my brain—a warning from the Beyond to be true to the best that is in me though the heavens fall." A counterpart of the father's development he could see in that of his country. Staring out under better auspices than any other country America had become, not the most successful country in the world, but "the greatest failure"; it too had traded its soil for shallow possessions. Therefore, O'Neill was convinced, "there's bound to be retribution".

Fatalism Versus Free-Will

The idea of retribution presupposes that man has a free will; if this were not so the dictum "whatsover a man soweth, that shall he also reap" would be meaningless as a moral principle. O'Neill's fatalism did not prevent him from believing in a free will. In a letter to Mary Clark he points out that in his struggle with fate, "the brave individual always wins", for "fate can never conquer his—or her—spirit". In the letter to Agnes Boulton just quoted we have seen how he hesitates between blaming life and blaming his wife and himself. Neither O'Neill nor such fatalistic characters as Anna Christie and Mary Tyrone refrain from blaming both themselves and others, although their fatalism, were it absolute, should really invalidate such an attitude; obviously they also—or at times—take a free will into account. The strange sense of guilt characteristic both of O'Neill and of his protagonists further implies a feeling of *personal* responsibility. A remark by the dramatist in 1946, although it is a slight overstatement, seems to clinch the matter: "In all my plays sin is punished and redemption takes place."

The Tragic Ambivalence

Thus, while O'Neill's fatalism is certainly more conspicuous than his insistence on man's free will, it did not hold absolute

sway over him ; his ambivalence has been well described by Agnes Boulton : "Firmly convinced that he could not alter that heavy hand of Fate, he must believe that it *was* possible – even if it were never to be possible. *The hopeless hope*—'Life's a Tragedy, hurrah!' " On one hand the strong sense of man's utter helplessness (fatalism) ; on the other the high dream that by giving his utmost man may conquer his fate (free will). Kramer, in his unpublished dissertation has also claimed that determinism in O'Neill's plays in no way excludes a sense of freedom on the part of the characters and that the tragic tension of the plays is intimately connected with the tension between freedom and necessity. It is characteristic that O'Neill himself, when referring to his concept of fate never talked about in the terms of a rational determinist but rather in those of a mystic ; he would use expressions like "inscrutable forces behind life", "the Force behind", "Mystery", etc., and when specifying his meaning he would group together old and new ideas and talk about "Fate, God, our biological past creating our present". This indicates that O'Neill's concept of fate did not spring merely, or even primarily, from modern scientific thinking, but is rather a blend of modern psychological determinism and ancient popular fatalism, Greek or Irish.

13

O'Neill's Art of Characterization

Art and Vision Inseparable

O'Neill's art of characterization is inseparable from his vision of life. And because he experimented with one dramatic form after another for projecting his view, his art of characterization varied in every stage of his development. He was disguised with those who tended to label him either as a naturalist or a pessimist or romanticist and wished sympathetic critics called him an experimenter with all the modes of apprehension. "To be called 'a sordid realist' one day, he said, 'a grim pessimistic Naturalist' the next, a 'lying Moral Romanticist' the next, etc. is quite perplexing... ...So I'm really longing to explain and try and convince some sympathetic ear that I've tried to make myself a melting pot for all these methods, seeing some virtues for my ends in each of them, and thereby, if there is enough real fire in me, boil down to my own technique."

Different Periods of Characterization

However, for the sake of convenience we may study O'Neill's art of characterization under different titles signifying the theme and technique of the plays he wrote in different periods. In his early plays one may detect his melodrama and hence his characters are realistic and melodramatic, particularly in *The Straw*, *Anna Christie*, *Diff'rent* and *The First Man*. In the next phase of his dramatic career O'Neill wrote symbolic plays in which, instead of resorting to depicting a crowd, he began to create representative individuals, concepts turned into characters. Characters, tragic protagonists especially, are symbols of dream and illusion, courage and fortitude, higher ideals, poetic sensibility, rebellion, struggle against an alien world.

Expressionism

Being dissatisfied with the banality of surfaces of the realistic method of character portrayal, he experimented with expressionism. *The Emperor Jones* is his first expressionistic play which was followed by another play written in the same technique. Brutus Jones is O'Neill's expressionistic hero. However, his expressionism is closer to Strindberg's "psycho-expressionism" than to its German variant to be called "socio-expressionism". *The Emperor Jones*, sometimes

called "monodrama", where the distinction is motivated by a character's state of mind and where that character is still a human being. *The Hairy Ape* apparently developed in the direction of expresssionism, yet never reached full-fledged German style. Its position is somewhere between the expressionism of *The Emperor Jones* and that of playwrights like Toller or Kaiser : realistic and stylized elements are mixed, and there is still quite a lot of emphasis on characterization but also on social ingredients.

Psychoanalysis and O'Neill's Characterization

Freudian psychoanalysis enriched O'Neill's insight into the depth of human psyche and he created characters representing psychological complexes in plays such as *The Strange Interlude* and *Mourning Becomes Electra.* In the last phase of his career, however, his art matured considerably and keeping in view the serious nature of the plays he wrote, he created three-dimensional characters.

Positive Characteristics

A study of the men and women that move through the world of O'Neill's dramas reveals some noteworthy characteristics that many of them have in common. One is impressed by the courage and fortitude with which they face the unfavourable circumstances of the world in which they live. They are determined to give life meaning and value in defiance of a world that is impersonal and unconcerned about the ambitions of human beings. The favourite character of an O'Neill play has dreamy eyes. His characters live in two worlds : one the outward world of physical reality, the other, a world of unfulfilled and passionate desire. This latter world is the one which the dreamer wishes for with all the pent-up powers of his being. To this world he will sacrifice all that life has given him, for there is nothing in life that for a moment is comparable to the genuine reality of his dream. Captain Bartlett in *Where the Cross is Made* commits murder because his longed-for dream of pirate treasure seems to have come true, and in another play, another sea captain sacrifices the sanity of his wife in order that his desire for a full load of whale oil may become a reality.

Dreamy Eyes

The characteristic of the dreamy eyes appears consistently throughout the plays. In *Lazarus Laughed*, Miriam's mask is described in these words : "The eyes of the mask are almost closed. Their gaze turns within, oblivious to the life outside, as they dream down on the child forever in memory at her breast." And in *The Great God Brown* Margaret is described thus : "She is almost seventeen, pretty and vivacious, blonde, with big romantic eyes, her figure lithe and strong, her facial expression intelligent but youthfully dreamy, especially now in the moonlight." While Dion's face is not

described by the word "dreamy", a synonym serves to convey the same idea. "His face is masked. The mask is a fixed forcing of his own face—dark, spiritual, poetic, passionately super-sensitive, helplessly unprotected in its childlike, religious faith in life."

Arrogant Defiance of Life

In *Diff'rent*, Emma Crosby appears as "a slender girl of twenty ...Her face, in spite of its plain features, gives an impression of prettiness, due to her large, blue eyes which have an incongruous quality of absent-minded romantic dreaminess about them !" And in *Welded*, Michael Cape is likewise a member of the race of dreamers, tortured dreamers, for it is a part of the dreamer's character that he lives in a world of conflict and divided ends. Cape is "tall and dark. His unusual face is harrowed battlefield of supersensitiveness, the features at war with one another—the forehead of a thinker, the eyes of a dreamer, the nose and mouth of a sensualist...There is something tortured about him—a passionate tension, a self-protecting arrogant defiance of life and his own weakness, a deep need for love as a faith in which to relax."

Thwarted Romanticists

Robert, in *Beyond the Horizon*, "is a tall slender young man of twenty-three. There is a touch of the poet about him expressed in his high forehead and wide, dark eyes." A more complex character, but no less of a thwarted romanticist than Robert, is Stephen Murray in *The Straw*. He is a "tall, slender, rather unusual-looking fellow with a pale face, sunken under high cheek bones, lined about the eyes and mouth, jaded and worn for one still so young. His intelligent, large hazel eyes have a tired, dispirited expression in repose, but can quicken instantly with a concealment mechanism of mocking, careless humour whenever his inner privacy is threatened...He is staring into the fire, dreaming, an open book lying unheeded on the arm of his chair." Juan Ponce de Leon, in *The Fountain*, is described in the following manner: "His countenance is haughty, full of a romantic adventurousness and courage ; yet he gives the impression of disciplined ability, of a confident self-mastery—a romantic dreamer governed by the ambitious thinker in him." And twenty years later—"His hair and beard are gray. His expression and attitude are full of great weariness. His eyes stare straight before him blankly in a disillusioned dream."

Dreams : Beautiful But Destructive

And so it is from beginning to end in this world of Eugene O'Neill. His chief characters are poetic dreamers, ill-fitted to cope with a world that is inimical to poetry. These men and women drift down the stream of life, fighting desperately to maintain their position and, in spite of the current, to reach the happy shore of

their dreams. They present one of the strange anomalies of life, in that their dream embodies all that is beautiful and good, and just because of that they are destroyed. As is true of the great heroes of all tragedies, and especially Shakespeare's, they are destroyed by their virtues. Marsden in *Strange Interlude* is another member of the hapless company of idealists who are incapable of accepting the reality of the world and are destroyed by their own dreams of beauty. He is described : "His face is too long for its width, his nose is high and narrow, his forehead broad, his mild blue eyes those of a dreamy self-analyst, his thin lips ironical and a bit sad. There is an indefinable feminine quality about him, but it is nothing apparent in either appearance or act." He is a man fascinated by his own idealism and at the same time conscious of the limitations of his ideal. Speaking of Nina he says :

> But sometimes the scent of her hair and skin...like a dreamy drug...dreamy !...there's the rub !...all dreams with me ! my sex life among the phantoms !

Even the unimaginative Mrs. Fife in *Dynamo* is not wholly of this world of reality, for beneath her calm exterior there lies the shadow of something unrealized. "Her eyes are round and dark blue. Their expression is blank and dreamy." The great Marco who could see nothing in the eyes of the beautiful princess, though it was his duty to study them every day, was in his youth of a poetic nature. His father said of him : "But still heedless. A dreamer !" Even old Ephraim Cabot in *Desire Under the Elms* is described in these words : "His eyes have taken on a strange, incongruous dreamy quality."

Asking More From Life

Throughout the whole of O'Neill's work, men and women characters are brought to a tragic end because they ask more from life than life can offer them. They are incapable of reconciling themselves to the limitations of the world in which they live. The narrow confines of their environment irk them, and they dream beyond the horizon into an imaginative world where all is beautiful and good. Living in this divided world, the one of reality, the other of imagination, they are continually tortured by the passionate longing of their dreams and the grim reality of their immediate surroundings.

The Lost Moderns

Besides being romantic dreamers, O'Neill's characters are also lost moderns. Their passion is not the passion of Christ. It is the passion of business, ownership and acquisitiveness. Something drives them on to seek freedom. But it is a freedom which disturbs, unsettles, demanding a restless pace. Where the Greek man might find release in aesthetic or ethical catharsis, and the medieval man might place it all in the lap of God, O'Neill's skeptical and

disillusioned moderns can find no such resting points. Their appeal is to science and to psychoanalysis. But the "Dynamo" does not answer, and analytic probings only render communication more confusing. When they try the way "downward" towards innocence, they discover that it is too late for that. They have been driven out from the naive plane, and know too much to be content with not knowing enough.

Sticking to Middle Position

The specific nature of O'Neill's problem derives from his concern with characters who stand in an unsteady midway position. In fear of losing their power, they are nervous, fretful, discontented. In Chekhov (where this group never played a leading role) they just talk about it apathetically. In Odets they react forcefully to the threat but are finally released after they have lost their illusions of power. O'Neill's people cling to their positions tenaciously. Hence, where in Chekhov the characters develop passively, and in Odets they are transformed radically, in O'Neill their transformation is partial, jittery, and interrupted. Where it is thorough it remains barren because they lack the substitute norms which save the characters of Odets. The efforts of O'Neill's people are concentrated on rising to or holding on to their middle position. Brutus Jones and Jim struggle against being driven back to their original colour lines. Yank accepts the embrace of death rather than sink back to his pit of not "belonging". In Nina and Lavinia the will to power is so extreme and insistent as to reach near hysteria.

Negative Rebellion

Brutus Jones, Yank, and Jim reach out from "below", Nina and Lavinia from "above", with Brown, Dion Anthony, and John Loving occupying an intermediate position on the intellectual-poetic level. But their rebellion, being incomplete or negative, proves inadequate to cope with their situation. The result is that these characters are invaded by doubts which split their personalities. It was O'Neill's startling innovation to give *theatrical* form to the dissociated personality through the visions in *The Emperor Jones*, the masks in *The Great God Brown*, the "double talk" in *Strange Interlude*, the change of personality in *Mourning Becomes Electra*, and the *Doppelganger* motif in *Days Without End*. Brutus Jones repudiates and is repudiated by both blacks and whites. What is here projected through the twilight consciousness of one person is dramatized in the later plays, where O'Neill extends the technique of dissociation to the point where it becomes a naturalistic form. In *The Great God Brown* he would have us *see* the split in his characters by their use of masks ; in *Strange Interlude* he would have us *hear* the evidence of their duality, and in *Dynamo* and *Days Without End* we are both to *hear* and *see* the absolutes towards which O'Neill's

desperate people finally veer. In the one we hear and see the Dynamo refusing to give up its secret; in the other we hear Loving's prayer that he may find peace. And in the silent Christ statue we see the "granting" of the prayer.

Transvaluation of All Values

In O'Neill's two major plays, *Strange Interlude* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*, the action pivots on a war scene which serves as the background for the inner wars of the characters. Nina rebels against her father's intervention which kept her from consummating her love for Gordon; Lavinia and Orin trespass all natural boundaries in defiance of their father's strict morality. But their warlike challenge is wild, explosive and blind. Nina would transvaluate all values. Deprived of love, she rejects love itself, giving herself to men and marrying without love. Even her child is conceived in loveless "scientific" planning. Having freed herself from all outer authority, Nina is trapped by the authority within herself. Her desire for possession ends in herself being possessed. Each new act only leaves her more a prey to guilty feelings. They are the Erinyes of middle-class conscience.

Death in Life

In *Strange Interlude* the characters still manage to live and talk themselves out. Nina enjoys afternoons with her lover Darrell, bears a son and stays married to Sam Evans. In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, all expression is turned inward. Here, love is for oneself, sinful and guilty love of daughter for father, son for mother, brother for sister. It is the sunset stage of the "upper" development. (All the events in this play occur toward evening or at night.) "We've renounced the day, in which normal people live—or rather it has renounced us. Perpetual night-darkness or death in life—that's the fitting habitat for guilt!" The "rich exclusive Mannons" feel guilty in no longer being capable of productive love. They snatch at love stealthily from those below, from Marie Brantome, the nurse girl with the joy of life (reminiscent of Regina in Ibsen's *Ghosts*), and her son, Brant. Nina was still able to produce "in secret". The Mannons cannot do even that. The war has maimed them, and after the public civil war is over they continue a private civil war within themselves. Even as they succeed in keeping the murders from becoming public, the acts carry on their secret "publicity" within the characters themselves. The result is the *secular* tragedy in which suffering constantly mounts without alleviation. Lavinia, the master will in all three murders, hopes by her acts of "removal" to free herself for simple love. But what Lavinia cannot control is the effect of the action on herself. With each physical removal, she adds to her inner burden. The dead souls rule the living ones. She retains her wilfulness to the very end, refusing to atone, but the

confession and atonement take place nónetheless in the form of her self-rejection. "There's no one left to punish me. I'm the last Mannon. I've got to punish myself." With these words she enters her church of hell to practise love or hatred on herself.

Alienation

In Nina and Lavinia, O'Neill presents the ultimate in self and social alienation. Both are the masochistic products of modern rationalistic probing. Both attempt to wield and possess people's lives, as if they were "god and had created them". Nina renounces at the end. Lavinia remains defiant even in her acceptance of suffering. Her very self-surrender and self-immolation have the character of challenge and insubordination. She remains in the grip of the Furies.

Search For Innocence

In the midst of their sophisticated schemings, O'Neill's characters yearn for the state in which there is no knowledge of sin, where man is not tormented by "dreams of greed and power". But this return to innocence is thwarted, for it is inevitably invaded by the modern spirit of doubt. The conversion is rather the other way. "Have I done this to you already, Peter ?" Lavinia cries, as she notes that his eyes have taken on a suspicious look through contact with her.

The Business Characters

The business characters in O'Neill's later plays, unlike Marco Polo of the earlier one, become problematical in that they question their status. Brown doubts that he is "the great God Brown"; Sam Evans inherits Marco Polo's innocent acquisitiveness, but his success is illusory and planned for him by the sensitive and guilty characters, Nina and Darrell. He himself no longer enjoys the robust health of Marco, and while the insane streak in his family passes him by, he dies a sudden, "non-natural" death. What was an "instinct" of acquisitiveness with Marco Polo becomes neurosis with Nina and Lavinia. What was simple reasoning with him becomes tortured self-analysis. Marco Polo was intent on accumulating information and goods. The modern characters having gathered them, question their meaning, want to know what lies "behind" them.

Inadequate Answers

Dynamo presents the inadequacy of the answer given by modern science and Protestantism. The Fife house of "science" and the Light house of Protestant religion are seen simultaneously with both their living-rooms and bedrooms exposed to the public. Theirs is an

open world in which there are a few secrets. Reuben Light leaves his father's home to discover the new God, electricity. But his "protesting" upbringing leads him to ask for its hidden formula. Yet although the new god is the product of man's reason and the nature of science is to give precise and complete answers, the dynamo remains incommunicable. Reuben's demand for *absolute* knowledge is answered only by the unbroken *continuity* of the rhythm of the dynamo.

Living With Two Faces

But the state of living with two faces is painful. As Cybel tells Brown : "You've got to go to sleep alone." Most of O'Neill's people at last confess that they are in need of grace, not "justice". Brown died with Cybel's prayer : "Our Father, who art." Reuben's final cry is : "I only want you to hide me, Mother." Nina tires of the attempt to enjoy father, lover, and husband all in one, is "contentedly weary with life", as she delivers herself to the fatherly protection of "good old Charley". Only Lavinia refuses to bow, remaining "woodenly erect" in her defiance. In the Greek drama the Erinyes are followed by the Eumenides which augur the beginning of a new age. But O'Neill doesn't see the new order anywhere around. With few exceptions, the end of his characters is foreshadowed at the beginning. Locked up in their original sin they have recourse to original faith.

14

O'Neill as a Modern Playwright

An International Dramatist

O'Neill was America's first dramatist of international standing. Though his power exceeded his skill on many an occasion, his craftsmanship was still sufficient to carry him through some of the most ambitious projects attempted in the Western theatre since Aeschylus wrote his trilogies twenty-four hundred years ago. O'Neill represented the avant-garde both in America and in Europe in the Twenties, and his banner may still be seen fluttering in the vanguard. It is not too much to say that even the most venturesome living playwrights of America are generally discreet technicians in comparison with him. A leader of the experimental Little Theatre movement, O'Neill sparked a revolt of great moment against commonplace realism.

Anti-Puritan Rebel

O'Neill also expressed a general reaction against Victorian mores, especially against the Puritanism and Protestant ethic associated with American Victorianism, ranging himself in this respect on the side of the rebels of his generation led by Van Wyck Brooks and Randolph Bourne. Combined with a deeply felt rejection of middle-class complacencies, machine-worship, dollar-idolatry, and the entire cult of go-getting opportunism. O'Neill's lofty individualism placed him in the forefront of those who began to modernize the content of American drama no less than its form. Both dramatic form and content were further modernized by his response to the spread of Freudianism or depth psychology that led to his attempting to dramatize subconscious pressures. The means he adopted for this purpose alone carried him into areas of experimentation which only venture-some playwrights dared enter and where only exceptionally adept ones could survive.

Struggles With Form and Content

O'Neill's career allows us to infer that we should not take him less seriously than we do, for his struggles with form and content were singularly intense and imaginative. More than any other writer in the American theatre he endeavoured to give range and

significance to the drama, which had previously been mostly a narrowly commercial enterprise. This endeavour alone would justify our sense of indebtedness to him and our readiness to place him in the company of the European theatrical pioneers. But there is another, less easily definable, quality that distinguishes O'Neill. Almost alone among America's professional playwrights, he possessed a sense of integrity and self-immolating artistry that he never betrayed or even rationed.

Moving darkly through the maze of the modern world, O'Neill, in his maturity, refused to be comforted by the material enticements of modern society. He accepted no solace from Marxist movements that powerfully attracted many of his fellow writers and attracted him briefly, too, in his youth. He accepted no assurances from the status quo either.

Loyal to a Tragic Sense of Life

Another way of describing O'Neill's compulsion to wrestle with the angel—and O'Neill was one of the most compelled of modern playwrights—is to say that he was loyal to a tragic sense of life. He was a natural tragedian, though it is possible to question whether any particular play of his quite lived up to traditional high standards of tragedy, and though his forte was more tragicality than tragedy. But even if we agree with critics who believe his work. in lacking poetry and elevation, falls short of tragedy, we cannot legitimately deny his work tragic ambience. Above all, we must grant the integrity of his despair.

Acute Awareness of Humanity's Failures

O'Neill produced an impression of greatness by virtue of the absolute demands he made upon life and by an acute awareness of humanity's failures. His aim was to make the theatre express a Luciferian aspiration exceeded in some of his plays only by his sense of calamity that amounted to a Satanic sense of damnation. O'Neill is one of the few Faustians of modern literature—others are Dostoevski, Strindberg, and Kafka—for whom damnation is a psychological reality than a convenient religious fiction. It is true that O'Neill sometimes appears to be aiming too consciously at greatness. In the pursuit of magnitude he falls into some errors of taste and tact and tends to pile up his catastrophic situations and to schematize his dramatic conceptions—witness such ambitiously conceived pieces as *Strange Interlude* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*. But apparently the labour in his work had to *show* before the work could be impressive at all. He is not the man for finesse ; his temperament appears to have had little use for it. Whenever there is truth or depth of experience in the plays it is futile to wish that he had composed them less repetitively and insistently. Their emotional power is bound up with their massiveness.

Raw Talent

O'Neill's raw talent may embarrass his admirers, but it tends to reduce his detractors to impotence once they leave the library. In recent decades he presented the English-speaking commercial theatre with extreme challenges offered by only one other playwright, Sean O'Casey. O'Neill made the theatre rise to both his reasonable and unreasonable expectations. Intent upon having his say regardless of consequences to dramatic form or length, O'Neill became one of those rare playwrights with whom the practical theatre has been compelled to come to terms. There have been such writers in every theatrical period that has had some claim to significance.

Substance of Modernism

Of O'Neill's modern matter not much remains to be said ; it has already been touched upon in references to Freudian psychology and social thought. The rest of the substance of modernism to which O'Neill gave attention consists of the ideas of naturalism and scientism, the mechanistic and deterministic substitutes for faith in divine providence. But one major qualification must be added on O'Neill's behalf. Modernism was not in his case a sign of complacency. He was not content in unbelief. Modernism did not solve any fundamental problems for him, nor did it unriddle the world for him as it supposedly did for shallower men.

Search For Values

It is apparent that in O'Neill's search for values, a term that would be ostentatious when applied to most of his fellow playwrights, he had in view the magnitude of theme and treatment present in the past great ages of the theatre, especially in the age of Attic tragedy. Its masterpieces had left a strong imprint on his imagination. He sought that magnitude not as an imitator but as a strenuously creative artist. The Orestean trilogy furnishes the basis of *Mourning Becomes Electra*, and it is possible to detect the Hippolytus theme in *Desire Under the Elms*. But the classic manner is barely visible in O'Neill's plays ; psychological pressures take the place of the classic fate, and the dialogue of the characters is generally plain. Yet he attained dramatic expansiveness and frequent elevation in his plays.

Obsession With Damnation

We do not come close enough to O'Neill's particular genius until we realize that it is obsessed with damnation. The anguish of alienation pronounced in his work is far less conspicuous in the tragedies of Sophocles, Shakespeare, and Racine. They possessed the inestimable balm of great poetry, but this undeniably great gift is not the sole reason for their power to radiate light as well as heat and to attain a healing power rarely discernible in O'Neill. The point is that, unlike O'Neill, they were profoundly affirmative.

After the 1920 production of *Beyond the Horizon* the elder O'Neill said to his son : "Are you trying to send your audience home to commit suicide ?" There was a basis to the question.

Pessimism Versus The Tragic Spirit

Pessimism and the tragic spirit (which is ultimately affirmative) are at war in the works of O'Neill. In the canon there are plays, such as *The Iceman Cometh*, in which the playwright seems to put a premium on desperation, or, as in *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, to become prodigal with misery. But though he appears to have the Jacobean playwrights' taste for morbidity, he was usually more inclined to be mordant than morbid in his commentary on life, and his manner was chiefly one of a determined reaction against the optimism of shallow people breezily at ease in Zion. "Sure I'll write about happiness", he declared in an interview in 1922, "if I can happen to meet up with that luxury", and he went on to maintain that he found a compensating exaltation in writing tragedy. "A work of art", he said, "is always happy ; all else is unhappy." But all those qualifications cannot quite remove an impression of incompleteness produced by much of his work. It is an incompleteness of tragedy, reflecting an incompleteness in the playwright himself.

Keen Sense of Loss

O'Neill expresses a keen sense of loss quite aside from the usual tragic awareness of the misery of human life. It is hardly a secret that his special sense of desolation was associated with the loss of faith on the part of an introspective man who was born and reared a Catholic. A determined individualist unable to attach himself to the social causes that won the allegiance of many intellectuals in his time, he did not discover compensatory convictions. O'Neill gave continual evidence of traumatic experience in his youth, and the loss of religious faith was an important part of it ; he makes much of the problem in *Dynamo* and *Days Without End*. We find in his work a keen sense of loss of connection—of connection with God, nature, society, family, father.

Ambivalence

O'Neill's ambivalence is certainly no longer a secret. He set it down, dramatizing its source in the family situation with rough tenderness and candour when he wrote *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. This play, written late in his career, is explicit about ambivalences projected and symbolized in earlier plays. Here he was a characteristically modern dramatist, a divided man who was acutely aware of the division not only in himself but in his fellow men. Like his favourite modern playwright Strindberg, O'Neill made division itself the subject of his plays. In them he tried to master the division he found in human nature and in the human condition, and because this was no easy enterprise he was doomed to repeat the effort constantly.

Struggle Against Alienation

Had O'Neill been a shallow man he might have settled for small satisfactions ; had he been an essentially irreligious man he might not have been concerned with lack of faith ; had he been an unloving man he might have been content with the gregariousness that passes for love among low-voltage individuals. The tensions in his work are nearly always connected with his struggle against alienation. The secret of his dramatic intensity is to be found not in his theatricality but in his rebellion and anger, in an inability to resign himself to an arid view and way of life. He could not be at ease in a world without God, without love, and without trust in life. His plays make it plain that O'Neill remained the dramatist of failure and alienation to the very end of his career. It is as if he himself were the centre of dramatic conflicts that could be allayed perhaps but never resolved without some visitation—some experience on the road to Damascus—that never came to him. Peace of the spirit had come briefly after great turbulence to his favourite modern author, Strindberg ; it is possible that O'Neill once expected peace for himself, too. But it is evident that once O'Neill saw the world going from bad to worse in the Thirties he found justification for the very worst construction he had put on human nature and the destiny of the species.

Source of Anguish

Still, the source of the anguish in the late plays as in the early ones is personal, not political. If his plays have a larger reference than personal grief the credit belongs to his creative imagination. He had the true artist's power of imaginative projection necessary for the creation of significant drama. He also had the egocentricity of men of romantic sensibility, who make the world a reflection of their own spiritual condition. He perceived the world primarily through his temperament and mood ; division in himself became division in the rest of the world. When angry with the world he could have borrowed Othello's words about Desdemona : "......when I love thee not, Chaos is come again."

Significant Torment

Should we consider O'Neill overwrought it would be well to remember that his emotional power lies largely in his sense of significant torment. If he strains so much it is partly because his subject matter has more than surface reality for him ; his dramatic material invariably acquires poetic and, at times, even metaphysical connotations. The loneliness of sailors in the *SS Glencairn* sea pieces, for example, becomes the loneliness of man in the universe, and the disorientation of Yank, the hairy ape who tries so desperately

to "belong", is a symbol of man's severance from the world of nature. Yank, O'Neill declared, is "the symbol of man who has lost his old harmony with nature, the harmony he used to have as an animal and has not yet acquired in spiritual way." Unable to move forward towards complete humanity Yank dies in his attempt to return to the animal state.

The Larger Meaning

In a play filled with naturalistic dialogue as primitive as the mentality of Yank and his fellow stokers, O'Neill still had in mind only the larger meaning. "The subject", he said, "is the same one that always was and always will be the one subject for drama, and that is man and his struggle with his fate. The struggle used to be with the gods, but is now with himself. his own past, his attempt to belong." Anna Christie's father is continually conscious of the irony of fate and of a malevolence in the nature of things that the old sailor associates with the "Old davil sea". And in succumbing to primal fears in the jungle, Emperor Jones reenacts the whole drama of atavism, the drama of humanity's inability to abolish the ghosts of the racial past.

Hatred of the Banality of Surfaces

Play after play reflects O'Neill's disinterest in literalness and dissatisfaction with the naturalism he scorned as "holding the family Kodak up to ill-nature" and favouring "the banality of surfaces". It was the deep experience and the large frame of reference that interested him. It is true enough that his effort to use symbolism and attain emotional resonance contrasts noticeably with the low condition of most of his heroes and with the commonplaceness of their dialogue The familiar O'Neill characters such as Chris Christopherson, Yank, Orin, and Hickey are anything but Promethean figures. But they are frequently involved in situations that transcend their actual condition or environment. They rise in stature with their awareness of irony and of crass casualty in the universe, with their sense of being lost in the cosmos, with the intensity of their fateful love and hate. It is impossible to forget that O'Neill himself is speaking through them ; it is *his* largeness of tragic feeling that gives them their magnitude. An amplitude of tragic perception appears even in so intimate a family drama as *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. The tragic sense of isolation announced in this play is the final clue to O'Neill's course as a modern dramatist.

15

O'Neill and Contemporary American Drama

A Prophet of Modernism

There can be no doubt that O'Neill represents virtually everything that is fundamentally modern about the American theatre. He reflects also all that has been modern about the European theatre in his restless experimentation, his avid cultivation of new ideas, his assertive individualism, and his intense unease. In many plays, he is most modern when his writing is most personal, and both his success and defeat parallel the course of our modernity. The success was that of a restless spirit honest enough to refuse to feel or think by rote, and the effect is often as provocative as a leading question and as exciting as a plunge down a waterfall. He dignified the craft of playwriting in America. He made it a calling rather than a trade, and he gave playwrights hitherto mostly hacks or entertainers but never oracles, a position of some importance in our cultural life. Though his power exceeded his skill on many an occasion, his craftsmanship was still sufficient to carry him through some of the most ambitious projects attempted in the Western theatre since Aeschylus wrote his trilogies twenty-four hundred years ago. O'Neill represented the avant-garde both in America and Europe in the Twenties, and his banner may still be seen fluttering in the vanguard.

Seriousness

O'Neill's essential quality is his seriousness. His moral energy is so intense and so dominating, we quite forget about lesser questions, like style, plot, even characterization. His technical range, of course, is large, but whether he is writing expressionistic plays or naturalistic ones, whether he is concerned with an individual's relation to the world around him or with the tensions among the members of a family, he is relentless in pursuing the universal question. Whatever momentary descents to sentimentality there may be in O'Neill he does not descend to it in the largest dimension of the play. O'Neill's granitic hardness about ultimate issues is what finally makes him impossible to escape.

Desire Under the Elms

Let us consider *Desire Under the Elms*. It defies usual analysis

as a tragedy. And perhaps it is not in any usual sense a tragedy, but this is not our point at present. The hero is heroic because in spite of any inherent flaw, in spite of the world's arrangement of things to afflict him, he emerges triumphant. The loss of his wife, the loss even of his son, affirms him in his rocklike loneliness, strength, survival, and dedication. Perhaps this distresses us, too, for Ephraim has indeed given up something of that recognizable human frailty which makes us all, for the moment, Oedipus or Hamlet or Strindberg's captain. But the play is a testimonial, finally, to the endurance, the beauty, the brute wisdom of sheer human strength.

O'Neill Versus Williams

Where O'Neill's emphasis is on Ephraim Cabot, Tennessee Williams handling the same familial situation (compare *A Streetcar Named Desire*, which has interesting parallels) would have focussed on the sons, or would have made the strength of Cabot like that of Kowalski, essentially animal-like. Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* is as merciless a family portrait as O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. But where the characters, every one, of *The Glass Menagerie* are driven by self-pity, are focussed almost pathologically inward, those of *Long Day's Journey Into Night* mesh with one another, feel one another's anguish and loneliness and share one another's fate. O'Neill's tragedy is familial, and consequently social, and ultimately universal ; that of Williams is simply a matter of several individual despairs and frustrations mingling. It really never rises above the clinical. Where O'Neill jars us, Williams only puzzles us, leaving all sorts of lurking motives to hang like loose threads around the borders of his fabric : Why does Tom Wingfield become a wanderer over the face of the earth ? Why does he always see his sister's face wherever he goes ? Just what is he running away from ?

Search For Meaning

Let us now push the comparison between Williams and O'Neill a little further. O'Neill, like Faulkner, examines in the puritan context of American life such abominations as prostitution, adultery, alcoholism, dope addiction, near incest. He is a dark writer. But the examination seems to us to be always in terms of finding meaning ; the responsibility of one person to another is part of what makes the tragedy ; O'Neill's tragic characters do not simply apologize for what they are, for what they have done ; they seek to be understood to be excused or forgiven ; they seek to find themselves in a mysterious world while still retaining their identity, while still assimilating their transgressions. Williams' characters are either arrogantly indifferent to the moral issues altogether, free-floating and unbound (Kowalski), or are shabbily sorry for themselves (Tom Wingfield). And, finally, Williams sometimes reads like a caricature of O'Neill : compare the fat old goat, Big Daddy, who lives on nothing but the memory of his lusts, with the truly huge figure of Ephraim Cabot.

O'Neill and Saroyan

The Iceman Cometh has sometimes been derisively compared with Saroyan's *The Time of Your Life.* But actually it has a force and a vitality that raise it far above Saroyan's sentimental record of saloon life. More than this, a careful reading of the text suggests that the play is more akin to the panoramic explorations of Strindberg than to the idle, often frivolous, boozy vignettes of Saroyan. It is hard to believe that Saroyan could have written any plays without the precedent of O'Neill.

O'Neill Versus Miller

O'Neill stands as a point of reference, as a touchstone, for other American dramatists as well. Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, like O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, is an account of the disintegration of an American family. We have two sons in each who cannot find themselves. In each, the husband suffers from a peculiarly deluding form of the American dream. The wives in each are fragile women, respected and loved by their men. Once we leave the superficial resemblances, however, the plays are poles apart. The factitiousness of *Death of a Salesman* becomes boldly clear when we compare the tone, the texture, even the details of the two plays. First, the details. We know what it is that Tyrone 'sells', what it is that has driven him to his compulsive investing in real estate to the neglect of his wife's and son's health. We understand how it is that his sons have remained so dependent on him. But, as has been remarked, we never do know what it is that Willy Loman sells; like himself, we do not know what 'secret' of living he has failed to solve. We are asked to believe that the failure of at least one of Willy's sons has something to do with Willy's infidelity to his wife; we are asked to believe that Willy's failure itself has something to do with the rottenness of American society. We are asked to take the tragic events in Miller on faith and are persuaded to do so by an enormously skilled dramaturgy. But we see and feel that O'Neill's family carries its doom simply from being human beings with a particularized history. As in all tragedy, we are not asked or compelled by the playwright just to feel sorry for them. We are forced to identify. The fate of the Tyrones is the fate of all of us. The fate of the Lomans is ours only at stray moments: Loman's asking his nephew what is the secret of life; Mrs. Loman's funeral oration.

O'Neill and Other American Playwrights

O'Neill serves similarly to reveal the failures and shortcomings of other American playwrights, Inge and Odets, Anderson and Hellman, and perhaps even some of America's less serious playwrights, Sherwood and Behrman and Wilder. Take *Our Town* for the moment. It is an unflagging exercise in a cute avoidance of depth and particularity. It is not even quite like a *Saturday Evening*

Post cover, which occasionally does portray a character with an individualized homeliness. Wilder's technique is like that of America's shrewdest popular entertainers, to offer a joke, for example, while denying responsibility for it : if it is successful, the entertainer gets the applause ; if it fails, well, it's not his fault, it's the fault of the joke. "This really happened..." is the gambit of these comedians ; blame reality, blame truth, blame the plainness of American life, if the joke or the play doesn't come off. So with *Our Town.* If it is hackneyed, sentimental, indifferent to frustration and sadness (the town drunk ; even the deaths of some of the main characters), well, that's life, you know : it really happened. By contrast, think only of *Ah, Wilderness !*, which is an imaginative, light-hearted, universalized yet never superficial or generalized exploration of the same sort of context as that of *Our Town.* O'Neill has the courage of his vision and does not need to use tricks to hedge his sense of rightness.

Social Plays

Social plays like *The Hairy Ape* and *Anna Christie* are closer to the essential mysteries of American life than some of Odet's plays, for all of O'Neill's maudlin and pretentious details. Odet's work, of course, will always remain an authentic record, if only in stray speeches, of a significant part of American life. But consider only Yank's quest for identity in an alien world, or Chris's effort to find order and meaning for his daughter in the face of the world's fog and indifference, to see how O'Neill cuts through to the bone of tragedy. Even those ambitious 'Jamesian' studies of individual relations, in *Strange Interlude* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*, are more compelling and ambitious than Lillian Hellman's plays in a similar genre. At least, we cannot so easily say of O'Neill that he is Chekhovian or Ibsenion ; he is characteristically himself, even when this is bad.

A Wide-Ranging Theatrical Effort

O'Neill's effort in the American theatre has been a wide ranging one. Like Faulkner, if he had not written so much and attempted so many different things, he would perhaps have not written his masterpieces. We may charge him with awkwardness, with lack of proportion, with a too sprawling ambition, with a failure to see the clear line between melodrama and tragedy, with lapses into outrageous sentimentality, with an incapacity to see and apply the point of technical experiments. We can never charge him with frivolity, with sheer imitation, with shallowness, with aimless theatricality.

Challenging of the Meanings

Lionel Abel, writing of Gelber's *The Connection* in *Partisan Review*, points out that basically it questions the meaningfulness and satisfaction of all of our activities. He suggests that it is this questioning which gives Gelber's play its vitality and validity. Now it is

plain to us that O'Neill was engaged throughout his career in a similar challenging of the meanings and satisfactions of all of American life. He offered answers gropingly and tentatively, never simply committing himself to any one course, for life is too various and too mutable. O'Neill, like Faulkner, James, Melville, spoke the American idiom with depth and involvement. He 'engaged' with life. Like Faulkner, perhaps, O'Neill deemphasized mind, for he felt and apprehended better than he could think or could ever know. He lived and spoke only in his plays.

Significant Issues

And it is the seriousness of O'Neill's concern with his material, in theme, substance, and technique, which makes his body of drama finally as important as that of the European masters. America's other writers, however momentarily successful in defining significant issues, have not been driven by that dedicated intensity to say as much in so many ways on so many issues – even when their voices at one moment or another were sharper and more clear. O'Neill reached out restlessly, even when he had no voice, even when his reaching was more like a blind, pathetic clutching, when he did not know just what it was he was reaching for. O'Neill's dramatic efforts were never the result of simple personal statement or apologia; personal understanding, yes, an understanding that in its depth and honesty transcended autobiography and became tragedy, that is, became an account of the human passage through life.

The Two Traditions

The new European dramatists work in the great tradition of Strindberg, Ibsen, Shaw, Pirandello. O'Neill worked in that tradition as well as in the tradition of serious American fiction. It is not enough to imitate the patina of the European masters, which will of course insure immediate appearance of high seriousness. It is necessary to work from the inside out, as O'Neill did, to take drama and art as seriously as life itself.

16

Introduction to Mourning Becomes Electra

Greek Sources

The title of the play suggests its relation to the Greek drama. The story of the house of Atreus was set down by Homer, Pindar, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and diverse other Greek writers whose works are not extant. From this house shadowed by an ancient curse, Agamemnon, brother of Menelaus, goes forth to the war at Troy. His wife, Clytemnestra, the sister of Helen, during her husband's absence takes for her paramour Aegisthus and shares the government of Argos with him. In due time Agamemnon, having at the God's behest sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia and bringing with him Cassandra, Priam's daughter, returns and is murdered by Clytemnestra and her lover. Electra, her daughter, is shamed and degraded and prays for the return of her brother Orestes, long ago sent out of the country by his mother and now become a man. Orestes returns, kills Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. He is pursued by the Erinyes, and only after wandering and agony and a vindication of himself before the tribunal of Athena's Areophagus is he cleansed of his sin.

Narrative Pattern

Mourning Becomes Electra begins with the mother and daughter, Christine and Lavinia, waiting there in the house of the Mannons, the return of Ezra Mannon from the war, which with Lee's surrender is about over. A thread of romance is introduced between Lavinia and Peter, and between Lavinia's brother, Orin and Hazel, Peter's sister. Meanwhile, Captain Adam Brant comes to call ; he pays a certain court to Lavinia, and she, acting on a cue from the hired man, who has been on the place sixty years, traps him into admitting that he is the son of one of the Mannons who had seduced a Canadian maid servant and been driven from home by his father, Lavinia's grandfather. She has all her data straight now. She has suspected her mother, followed her to New York, where Christine has pretended to go because of her own father's illness,

but has in fact been meeting Adam. Lavinia has written to her father and to her brother, hinting at the town gossip about her mother. We learn that Adam had returned to avenge his mother but instead had fallen passionately in love with Christine, who loves him as passionately as she hates her husband. From this point the play moves on, with the father's hatred of the son, who returns it, the son's adoration of his mother, the daughter's and the mother's antagonism, the daughter's and father's devotion, to Christine's murder of her husband with the poison sent by Adam and substituted for the medicine prescribed against his heart trouble. Orin returns, after an illness from a wound in the head. Christine tries to protect herself in her son's mind against the plots of Lavinia. Lavinia, in the room where her father's body lies, convinces him with the facts ; they trail Christine to Adam's ship, where she has gone to warn him against Orin. Orin shoots Adam. Christine next day kills herself. Brother and sister take a long voyage to China, stop at the Southern Isles, come home again. Substitutions have taken place. Lavinia has grown like her mother, Orin more like his father. Meanwhile, his old affair with Hazel, encouraged at last by Lavinia, who now wants to marry Peter, is cancelled ; he finds himself making an incestuous proposal to Lavinia and is repulsed by her. He shoots himself. In the end, Lavinia, speaking words of love to Peter, finds Adam's name on her lips. She breaks with Peter, orders the blinds of her house nailed shut, and goes into the house, to live there till her death. Justice has been done, the Mannon dead will be there and she will be there.

Parallel Characters

It is now obvious that the American dramatist, as the Greek did, used a well known outline which he could fill in to his purpose. Obviously, too, Ezra Mannon is Agamemnon, Captain Brant is Aegisthus, Christine Clytemnestra, Lavinia Electra, and Orin Orestes. But to dismiss the matter by saying that O'Neill has merely repeated the classic story in modern terms is off the track. Let it go at that and you will miss even the really classic element in the play and get only the Greek side of it that is self-evident and that would be easy for any dramatist to imitate.

Departures From the Greek Play

The story itself follows the Greeks up to the middle of the third division of the play, and here the incest motive, the death of Orin and the transference of the whole situation and the dramatic conclusion from the mother to the sister depart from Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Adam's relation to the family adds to the role of the lover the motif of a blood relationship. The old hired man, the confidant, parallels to some extent a Greek device,

familiar to us in countless plays. The townspeople and workmen are now and again a kind of chorus. Many of the shadings and themes are from the older plays ; for a good example, the servant's line in Aeschylus about the dead killing one who lives, which underlies one of the new play's main themes. The death of the lover, as in Aeschylus and Euripides, not as in Sophocles, comes before that of the mother, which throws the stress where the O'Neill play needs it. The division of the play into three parts is, of course, like the trilogy of the Greek dramatist. On the other hand, the dividing line is much less distinct in *Mourning Becomes Electra* ; the final curtain of the first part, for example, falls, it is true, on Mannon's death, as in Aeschylus it does on Agamemnon's, but there is not the same effect of totality because of the stress put on Lavinia ; in *Agamemnon* Electra does not even appear.

Magnificent Theme

The magnificent theme that there is something in the dead that we cannot placate falsely is there in the Greek plays and in the O'Neill play as well. The end of the play is by imaginative insight Greek in spirit : Lavinia goes into the house, the blinds are closed for ever, the stage is silent, the doors shut, the exaltation is there, the completion, the tragic certainty.

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Persons, Place and Time of Action in Mourning Becomes Electra

(A) PERSONS

(1) Ezra Mannon : (Brigadier-General) A tall, spare, big-boned man of fifty, the American version of the Agamemnon of the *Oresteia*.

(2) Christine : Ezra Mannon's wife, the American version of Clytemnestra of the *Oresteia*, a tall striking-looking woman of forty, with a fine, voluptuous figure.

(3) Lavinia : Daughter of the Mannons, the American version of Electra of the *Oresteia*, an older-looking young woman of twenty-three, thin, flat-breasted, angular, with a wooden, square-shouldered military bearing.

(4) Orin : Son of the Mannons, the American version of Orestes of the *Oresteia*, First Lieutenant of Infantry in the Union Army, thirty-year-looking youngman of twenty.

(5) Adam Brant : Captain of the clipper "Flying Trades", the American version of Aegisthus of the *Oresteia*, with a sensual and moody mouth, always fighting life.

(6) Peter Niles : A heavily-built young fellow of twenty-two, an artillery Captain in the Union Army, straightforward, guileless and good-natured.

(7) Hazel Niles : Peter's sister, a pretty, healthy girl of nineteen, with a strong chin and a smiling mouth.

(8) Seth Beckwith : The Mannons' gardener and man of all work, an old man of seventy-five with a gaunt face.

(9) Amos Ames : Carpenter by trade, a fat man in his fifties, on a holiday.

(10) Louisa : The wife of Amos, of the same age, but taller and stouter.

(11) Minnie : Louisa's cousin, a plump little woman of forty.

(12) Josiah Borden : The manager of the Mannon shipping company, around sixty, small and wizened, with white hair and beard and little sharp eyes.

(13) Emma : Josiah's wife, ten years his junior, a typical New England woman of pure English ancestry.

(14) Everett Hills, D. D. Minister of the First Congregational Church, stout and unctuous, snobbish and ingratiating, in his fifties.

(15) Mrs. Hills : Everett's wife, a sallow, flabby, self-effacing woman.

(16) Dr. Joseph Blake : The Mannons' family physician, a stout, self-important old man with a stubborn opinionated expression.

(17) The Chantyman : A thin, wiry man of sixty-five or so, with a weather-beaten, dissipated face, big, round, bloodshot, dreamy and drunken eyes.

(18) Ira Mackel : An old, hobbling farmer.

(19) Joe Silva : A Portugese fishing Captain.

(20) Abner Small : A wiry little old man of sixty-five, a clerk in a hardware store.

(B) PLACE OF ACTION

General Scene of the Trilogy

The action of the trilogy, with the exception of an act of the second play, takes place in or immediately outside the Mannon residence, on the outskirts of one of the small New England seaport towns.

(1) HOMECOMING

ACT I : Exterior of the Mannon house in New England—April, 1865.

ACT II : Ezra Mannon's study in the house—no time has elapsed.

ACT III : The same as Act I—exterior of the house—a night a week later.

ACT IV : A bedroom in the house—later the same night.

(2) THE HUNTED

ACT I : Exterior of the Mannon house—a moonlight night two days after the murder of Ezra Mannon.

ACT II : Sitting-room in the house immediately follows Act I.

ACT III : Ezra Mannon's study—immediately follows Act II.

ACT IV : The stern of the clipper ship "Flying Trades", at a wharf in East Boston—a night two days later.

ACT V : Same as Act I—Exterior of the Mannon house—the night of the following day.

(3) THE HAUNTED

ACT I : (Scene I) Exterior of the Mannon House—an evening in the summer of 1866.

(Scene II) Sitting-room in the house—immediately follows Scene I.

ACT II : The study—an evening a month later.

ACT III : The sitting-room, immediately follows Act II.

ACT IV : Same as Act I : Scene I—Exterior of the Mannon house—a late afternoon three days later.

(C) TIME OF ACTION

The plays comprising the trilogy take place in either spring or summer of the years 1865-1866.

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Outline Story of Mourning Becomes Electra

(1) HOMECOMING

ACT I

Waiting For Ezra

Christine and Lavinia, the wife and daughter respectively of Brigadier-General Ezra Mannon, are waiting for the old man who is to come home after the surrender of Lee during the American Civil War. Through Seth, the gardener of the Mannons, it is learnt that the townspeople gossip about the illicit relationship between Christine and one Captain Adam Brant. Lavinia also doubts the integrity of her mother's character ; owing to this fact she has chased her mother to New York where Christine had gone to meet her lover on the pretext of seeing her ailing father. Lavinia loves one Captain Peter Niles, and his sister, Hazel, loves Lavinia's brother, Orin Mannon. Peter and Hazel come and inquire about Orin who has not sent any letter to them since long. Peter anxiously asks Lavinia whether Orin really loves Hazel but Lavinia is so disgusted with Christine's affairs with Adam that she says that she hates love. She also says to Peter that she cannot marry him because her father needs her more. About Adam she says that he behaved with her romantically but she did not pay much attention to him.

About Adam

After the departure of Peter and Hazel Christine informs Lavinia that Adam is to come here. On Lavinia's insistence Christine agrees that she will talk about him to Lavinia after his departure. Then comes the gardener who tells a lot about Adam who, he says, resembles her father, brother and grandfather. Lavinia recalls the story of David, the brother of her grandfather, who loved a Canadian nurse named Marie Brantome and married her because she was going to have a baby. Her grandfather, Abe Mannon,

drove them out and demolished the house and built a new one. The child born to the nurse was Adam.

Lavinia Rejects Adam

Adam comes and appears to be making love to Lavinia as he has been advised by Christine to do, so that the girl cannot doubt Christine's relations with him. But Lavinia is enraged by the romantic gesture of Adam and says that it would be foolish to expect anything but romantic lies from the son of a low woman. This infuriates Adam who says that no Mannon can insult his mother until he is alive. Lavinia succeeds in confirming the parentage of Adam. Adam tells her the sad tale of his father and mother after they were driven by Abe and the cruelty of the old man who refused to give any financial help to Marie. David committed suicide and Marie was swallowed by poverty. When she was dead Adam swore to revenge her death on Ezra.

ACT II

Adam Resembles Ezra

Lavinia is looking at the portrait of her father hanging on the wall of his study. There is a startling likeness between him and Adam. Christine comes and Lavinia tells her about her visit to Adam which she denies but when Lavinia says that she saw her kissing Adam in New York, Christine admits everything. She explains how and why she loves Adam. Before their marriage Christine felt enamoured of Ezra but very soon she found him disgusting. She also tells Lavinia that she has always felt that Lavinia was born of her father and Orin was only her child. But after Orin's joining the army she had none to love for many years and when she met Adam she saw that he loved her. Lavinia tells her that the feigned love of Adam has a malicious design of taking the revenge of his mother on Ezra but Christine does not care for it. Then Lavinia warns Christine that Ezra would disown her publicly. She forces her mother to agree to her proposal that she will not see Adam and will remain a dutiful wife and only then Lavinia will not disclose this matter to her father. Christine says that Lavinia is sparing her not only for the sake of keeping the family safe from scandal but because she herself once wanted Adam. She warns Lavinia that if she discloses the former's relations with Adam she will go away with her lover. She also complains that Lavinia has always been trying to steal her place. However, the mother and daughter decide that Christine will dismiss Adam who is waiting for her and will never see him again. Relations between Adam and Christine exchange with each other what they have talked about to Lavinia. Then Adam asks whether Christine loved him because his face resembled Ezra's. Christine replies that she loved him because it

was Orin Adam made her think of. Adam tells her that when he heard that she was the wife of Ezra, he hated her for being Ezra's. He thought he would take her from Ezra and that would be part of his revenge. Then they plan to kill Ezra. They decide that Adam will send her a poisonous drug which she will give her husband when he will ask her his medicine for his heart trouble. The cannon at the fort keep booming and Adam goes away. Christine comes in the room and closes the door behind her.

ACT III

The Tangled Love Affairs

A week later Lavinia elicits from Seth further information about Adam's mother: she was frisky and full of life; she was a pretty woman whose hair was like Lavinia's mother's. Seth. also tells her that even her father was infatuated in love with Marief Christine comes and Seth goes away. She is dressed in a gown os green velvet and her face resembles Lavinia's. She sarcastically sayf to Lavinia that a puritan maiden should not enjoy the beauty o nature and harbour a feeling of love Then comes Ezra Mannon who is received by his wife and daughter in their own ways. He talks a lot about the problem of defeat and victory and death and narrates how Orin was wounded in the head and got brain fever. Orin acted as if he were a boy and always remembered his mother. He warns Christine not to baby Orin anymore. When Lavinia asks about his heart trouble he tells her that it is not a serious disease, though his doctor has advised him to avoid worry, overexertion and excitement. Ezra asks Christine about Adam's rumour to which she says that it is Lavinia who loves the Captain Further, she complains to Ezra that since he came home she has felt he has been suspecting her. Ezra drops this topic by commenting that it was foolish on her part to encourage Adam and give the gossips a chance to be malicious. However, Ezra regrets to have been rude to her and begins to kiss and caress her but Christine behaves coldly and indifferently. He complains that since their marriage she had been cold towards him. He starts reflecting upon his experience of life and death when he was on the front. He also recalls how he joined the army : instead of her love he got her hate which drove him to the Mexican War. When he came back home Orin was born to whom Christine turned and so Ezra turned to Lavinia but because Lavinia could not replace Christine, he sought to engage himself in many pursuits. He became a judge and then a mayor. Now, he says, he has come to surrender to Christine whatsoever there is within him.

ACT IV

Ezra's Uneasiness and Death

Ezra and Christine do not feel sleepy. Christine slinks out of the bed but Ezra calls her back and requests her not to leave him alone. He suddenly says that he is feeling strange, some sort of uneasiness troubling his mind, as if he were afraid Christine is waiting for something, for death to set her free This angers Christine who says that Ezra always considered her to be his property. But Ezra reacts bitterly and says that he did not marry her body. Christine's agony is that though before marriage she loved him, yet it was he who later on filled her heart with disgust. She also tells him how she fell in love with Adam. All this shocks Ezra who asks for his medicine and, getting an opportunity of playing her foul game, Christine brings a box containing poisonous pellets and administers one on him. Before his death Ezra calls Lavinia and cries out "She is guilty – not medicine." Lavinia interrogates Christine about his last words but the latter faints and Lavinia finds the box lying near her body. She doubts that Christine has poisoned Ezra.

(2) THE HUNTED

ACT I

Waiting For Orin

Two days have passed since the death of Ezra. Christine is broken down and Lavinia is cold and calm as an icicle. Christine, who is waiting for Orin, warns Hazel to be cautious of Lavinia who will do everything to keep Orin from marrying her. She is doing so for the purpose of keeping Orin away from the influence of Lavinia who, she fears, will disclose the Adam affairs. After a while Orin, Peter, and Lavinia come. Orin's face resembles Ezra's and Adam's. Orin is still visited by the memories of murders at the battlefield ; the house looks to him to be strange, ghostly and dead. He recalls to Lavinia his experience of war and the image of his father as an armyman—he was war to Orin, the war that would never end until Orin died. Lavinia warns him not to be under their mother's thumb. Christine comes and, seeing Lavinia staring at her, she says that she has been a good wife until she met Adam, and that she would have remained faithful to Ezra if he had been alive. She fears Lavinia doubts that she is still having relations with Adam. She asks Lavinia whether she knows the whereabouts of a box of medicine she has missed, a medicine that she takes to put her to sleep. Lavinia is all the time silent. Orin calls Christine and she shuts the door behind her.

ACT II

Haunting Memories

Orin's mind is still occupied with his father's memory. He feels as if Ezra were alive, though he finds everything in the house changed. He talks about his trip which was not a pleasant one because he suffered from headache. However, he is happy that he is back home and that he will live with his mother whom he finds more beautiful than before. Orin asks her why she wants to marry him off to Hazel and get rid of him. He puts another alarming question as to who is Adam Brant who has been calling on her. She tells a lie that the Captain has been visiting Lavinia. She poisons Orin against his father also. She says that Ezra hated Orin because she loved her son better than anything in the world. Orin is now under her influence—he says that he does feel sorry at his father's death. About Lavinia she tells him that since the death of Ezra she has started talking queer things—she says so for fear of Orin's believing Lavinia's statement about the Adam affairs. She also expresses her fear that Lavinia would accuse her of murdering Ezra and that she would report the matter to the police. So she implores Orin not to let Lavinia do all this and save his mother from disgrace. Orin assures her that Lavinia won't try to turn him against her and that he would not allow Lavinia to go to the police—he will do so for the sake of saving all of them from untoward situations. He also assures that he will forgive anything in her except the Adam scandal. The last words of Orin terrify her.

South Sea Islands

Then Orin changes the topic and starts discussing his trip to the South Sea Islands. Referring to the book "Typee" he says that when he was out of his mind, he felt he was in the midst of the beauties of nature on the Islands and that his mother was also with him—she was the Island itself. He promises her that he will never leave her nor will he marry Hazel or any other girl because Christine is his "only girl". Christine says that she still considers him to be her "boy". Orin tells her plan to marry Lavinia to Peter and then live with his mother happily. Lavinia calls him to see the dead body of Ezra and he hurries past her much against his wish and closes the door behind him. Christine tells Lavinia that she has already told Orin the whole of the Adam affair. She threatens that if Lavinia speaks anything about the Adam affair, she will tell the whole world that Lavinia desired her mother's lover and then tried to get her mother hanged out of hatred and jealousy. She says to Lavinia that Orin loves his mother and that he is glad that his father is dead and even if he comes to know that she has murdered Ezra, he will protect her. But the next moment she is seized by a hysterical terror and requests Lavinia not to tell Orin anything about Adam because she fears he will kill the Captain. Lavinia does not say anything—she walks out of the room, and Christine collapses and exclaims that she will have to warn Adam against Orin.

ACT III

Death Becomes the Mannons

Orin is standing by the head of the bier of his dead father. He stares at the face of his father and says that death becomes the Mannons, that Ezra was always like a statue of an eminent man, that he never cared to know Orin in life—perhaps they might be friends now when Ezra is dead. Lavinia is shocked to hear these words of Orin. Orin also feels guilty and resentful and starts talking about his experience of war : war meant to him murdering the same man over and over and in the end discovering that the man was he himself. Their faces keep coming back in his dreams and they change to Ezra's or Orin's face. The war is over but the war inside them who killed has not ended. Meanwhile he is assailed by Lavinia's charge against Christine and chides Lavinia for harbouring evil thoughts against Christine. Lavinia insists on her stand and expresses her desire to go to the police to pursue the matter if Orin does not punish Christine. Orin demands proof and Lavinia gives the box which he puts in his coat pocket and says that his mother is much more dear to him than his father. Lavinia says that Christine plotted in collaboration with Adam to kill their father and that she herself saw Christine kissing Adam. She also tells him that Christine will surely go to Adam and then they should follow her and verify the truth. She executes another plan also : she takes the box from Orin's pocket and puts it conspicuously on the body of Ezra. When Christine comes and sees the box she screams and stares at it with guilty fear. To Orin everything is clear now. He regrets to have come home in search of peace because he has lost the dream of his Island of peace that was his mother. Christine appeals to Orin to stop Lavinia from harming Adam and confesses that it is only she who is guilty. She rushes to the door and goes out.

ACT IV

Orin Shoots Adam

Christine meets Adam on his ship in East Boston and tells him that Lavinia has come to know about their murdering Ezra. She warns Adam of the danger to his life from Orin. He takes her to the cabin and Orin and Lavinia come along the deck. In the cabin Christine tells Adam how Ezra, before his death, pointed at her and said that she was guilty and how Lavinia detected everything. Adam is sorry that it was not a proper revenge he had sworn on his mother's dead body ; he ought to have fought with Ezra as two men fight for a woman. Christine advises Adam to run away somewhere and save his life. They decide to run away to Adam's

Islands of peace and happiness. Lavinia is satisfied to show proper proof to Orin who is bewildered to see his mother asking Adam to kiss her and dreaming of going to his Islands with Adam. A few minutes later Adam appears in the doorway and stands inside it. Orin steps through the door and shoots Adam dead. He smashes open everything in the stateroom so as to make it look as if thieves have killed Adam and turns Adam's pockets inside out and puts all the things he finds in it in his own with a plan to throw them in the sea later on. When Orin looks at the face of Adam which resembles his, he feels that he has killed himself. He says to Lavinia that if he had been in the place of Adam he would have also done what Adam did.

ACT V

Christine Shoots Herself

Christine, Orin and Lavinia have come back home from Boston. Orin tells Christine that he and Lavinia followed her to Boston and saw what she said to Adam and to her great shock, he tells her that he has killed Adam. Christine does not believe him and says that he is saying all this just for the sake of punishing her. She reminds him of his promise to protect her but he is full of rancour ; he cannot tolerate his mother's loving a "servant's bastard" ; her planning to go with Adam to the Islands of peace of his dream tortures him. Yet he requests Christine to forget Adam and try to live happily with her son. To Lavinia all this proves that Orin is again becoming Christine's crybaby for which she reprimands him and commands him to march away from there. Orin mechanically enters into the house and Lavinia says to Christine that Adam has paid the just penalty for his crime. Lavinia consoles her by saying that even after the death of Adam she can live happily but Christine stares as if it were the last insult. She rushes into the house and Lavinia makes a movement to follow her but she turns her back on the house and instantly is heard the sound of pistol shot—Christine has shot herself with Ezra's pistol. When Orin sees her dead body he feels that he has driven her to death ; he is sorry that she could not forgive him and repents of having boasted of killing Adam. Lavinia tries to calm him but he tears her hand away and regrets not to have let Christine believe that burglars killed Adam. Now he feels that he himself has murdered her, he breaks and weeps and says that he will go to find her, and seek her forgiveness. Lavinia again tries to console him and says that she loves him and she will help him to forget their mother. Orin goes back into the house and Lavinia sends Seth to call for Doctor Blake and tells him about the suicide of Christine. She follows Orin into the house.

(3) THE HAUNTED

ACT I : SCENE I

Orin and Lavinia Resemble Their Father and Mother

A year has passed. The Mannon house is unoccupied, though according to popular belief it is haunted by the ghosts of Christine and Ezra. Orin and Lavinia who had gone to China have landed in New York and are awaited here. Orin and Lavinia come—Lavinia resembles her mother and Orin his father in every respect. Orin's face is haggard and swarthy and is set in a blank lifeless expression. Lavinia is behaving with him like his mother and so she is very happy. Orin keeps his eye averted from the house, therefore Lavinia asks why he is doing so. She takes him towards the house and he walks like an automaton. When they reach the place where he had seen Christine lastly, he is haunted by her memory but Lavinia commandingly urges him to forget all that is past. He walks with her woodenly and they pass into the house.

ACT I : SCENE II

Haunted By Ghosts

The ghosts of the dead Mannons haunt Lavinia : looking at the portraits of the Mannons she says, "Why do you look at me like that ? I have done my duty by you !" Finding that Orin is not behind her, she calls him. He appears in the doorway. He tells her that he has been in the study because he felt his mother would be waiting for him there but he could not find her and on the other hand the ghosts of the dead Mannons are everywhere. He is sorry that he will not find Christine anymore to forgive him. Then with a resentful defiance in his voice he says that it does not matter if his mother is not with him ; he says that he is not Christine's son, that he is his father's son, a Mannon. To Lavinia he says that she is all in the world he has. Lavinia suggests that with the help of the love and friendship of Peter and Hazel their life would be happy. The mere mention of the word 'love' tortures Orin. "What right have I—or you—to love ?", he says. He further says that after the death of Christine Lavinia has become akin to their mother, as if Lavinia were stealing Christine's soul. Lavinia is worried over Orin's morbid spells and so she tries to convince him that Christine was an adulteress and murderess whom law ought to have punished but they protected her and if she killed herself, Orin was not responsible for her death. Orin temporarily seems to be impressed by Lavinia's arguments. Then comes Peter who talks to Lavinia romantically for a while. Orin says to Peter that the Islands he and

Lavinia visited proved to be Lavinia's only because she enjoyed the company of the natives there who sang and danced naked and all this disgusted him. Lavinia despatches Orin to Hazel and talks to Peter. They decide to marry soon and keep Orin with them. Lavinia apprises Peter of Orin's morbid spells particularly of his feeling of being responsible for the death of Christine and of the horror of war. She is lost in the memories of her pleasant experience of the Islands and says to Peter that she has learnt the blessings of love. She advises Peter to tell Hazel about the spiritual condition of Orin so that she may not feel scared by his queer behaviour. Orin comes and stares at them with jealous rage, and congratulates them and says that he is glad that they are happy. Lavinia stares at Orin with eyes full of dread.

ACT II

Orin Writes

Within a month Orin has aged so much that he looks as old now as his father in the portrait. He has locked himself in his father's study and is writing something. Lavinia comes and he hides the paper he has been writing on and tells her that he has been reading the law of crime and punishment. Even when it is day, he has lighted lamp because, he says, he hates daylight which he finds to be like an accusing eye ; he feels that perpetual night is the fitting habitat for the guilt which he has committed ; he considers that artificial light is more appropriate for his work ; it is a symbol of his life—a lamp burning out in a room of waiting shadows. He says to Lavinia that when he sees in Hazel's eyes love for a murderer he feels like confessing his guilt. He advises her also to confess her guilt. Lavinia then starts feeling that Orin is becoming her guilty conscience too. Orin does not find any difference between Christine and Lavinia because like his mother, Lavinia is also planning to desert him and marry Peter. But, he says, Lavinia cannot do so if she knows what he is writing—the history of the crimes of the Mannons right from Abe Mannon. He has written mostly about Lavinia because she possesses all the traits of the Mannons. He accuses Lavinia of having fancy for Wilkin, a ship officer, Adam, and Avahanni, a native on the Island they have visited recently. When he does not stop talking about her lustful relations with Avahanni, she falsely says that she loved the native. But this also angers him and then she tells him that she has told him a lie. Then he says that if he had come to know about her relations with the native he would have killed her. He warns her that she should never try to leave him and marry Peter and tells her that he is going to put this confession he has written in safe hands to be read in case she tries to marry Peter. Lavinia feels tortured by these feelings of Orin. She breaks down and sobs brokenly ; he forbids her to cry and asks

her to leave him alone so that he may finish his work. Lavinia goes out and Orin pulls out his manuscript and takes up his pen.

ACT III

Lavinia's Obsessions

Lavinia is also obsessed with the image of death, though she is still worried about the condition of Orin. Peter and Hazel come. Hazel wants to take Orin with her to her house with the permission of her mother because she thinks that Lavinia has locked him within the house and does not want to spare him from her possession. Peter also assents to her proposal because he thinks that till Orin and Lavinia are tied together he won't be able to marry Lavinia. Peter goes to attend the meeting of the Council and then Orin comes forward ; he gives Hazel a sealed envelope with the instruction that it should not be opened until something happens to him or to Lavinia or Lavinia tries to marry Peter. In the latter case Hazel should make Peter read the contents of the envelope the day before the wedding. He also says that Lavinia should not be allowed to be happy and she should be punished. To Hazel he says that she must not love him anymore. Hazel tells him that Lavinia has told her the whole story of his quarrel with Christine and her committing suicide and his feeling that he drove her to death. Now Orin requests Hazel to take him away from here, to which she agrees. But Lavinia does not allow him to go out and criticizes Hazel to interfere with their family affairs. She notices that Hazel is hiding something behind her about which Orin tells her that it contains those papers on which he has been working. She commands Hazel to return them to her which she does not. Lavinia implores Orin to get the envelope back from Hazel and promises that if he does so she can do anything he likes her to. Orin accedes to her request and Hazel starts to leave them with a feeling of disappointment. Orin tells her that the Orin she loved was killed in the war.

Orin's Suicide

To Lavinia Orin says that her promise means that she should not see Peter and give him up forever. He says that on occasions Lavinia seems to be Marie Brantome. He again harps on the need of their atonement for their crime. Lavinia says that they have not committed any crime and that whatever has happened is only justice. Orin goes near the portraits and says, as if addressing them, that Lavinia is harder to break than him and that their ghosts will have to haunt and hound her for a lifetime. Lavinia bursts out in frantic rage and hatred –she says that she hates him and wishes he were dead. Then Orin says that she wants to drive him to death After a few minutes Peter comes and Orin goes to the study saying

that he is going to clean his pistol. Lavinia says to Peter that she cannot wait any longer and requests him to marry her soon. In the meantime they hear a muffled shot from the study—Orin has shot himself. Lavinia sags weakly and utters in a faint voice, "Orin, forgive me." She hides the envelope in the drawer of the table and looking at the portraits, says, "Why do you look at me like that ? Wasn't it the only way to keep your secret, too ?" She marches stiffly from the room.

ACT IV

Lavinia Waits For Peter

On the day of Orin's funeral Lavinia gets every room of the Mannon house decorated with flowers for welcoming Peter. While she is waiting for Peter, Hazel comes and tells her that it is not true that Orin killed himself by accident but that Lavinia drove him to commit suicide. She says that she will not allow Lavinia to marry Peter because they will never be able to live a happy conjugal life. She holds Lavinia responsible for Peter's quarrelling with his mother and sister. At this Lavinia gets angry and threatens Hazel to kill her if she does not leave her alone. Before leaving the Mannon house Hazel says that she 'as already told Peter about Orin's envelope and makes an appeal to Lavinia's conscience and expresses her hope that the latter will do what she will consider right. Hazel goes away and Peter comes. They decide to marry soon and leave this house forever.

Lavinia's Self-Imprisonment

Lavinia feels that Peter's eyes are suspicious of life ; she asks whether he is thinking about what Peter wrote that day. However, Peter assures her that he did not believe what Peter talked about because the latter was out of his mind. Now Lavinia proposes to marry the same evening but Peter refuses because it does not look "right" to him to marry on the day of Orin's funeral. Moreover, he grows suspicious of her impatience and asks her if there was anything what Orin wrote that would stop them from marrying. Lavinia's psychic injury becomes acute—with a wild laugh she says, "The dead coming between." She implores Peter to love her with faith and trust Peter grows more suspicious ; he says perhaps there was something mysterious in the envelope. Lavinia says there was nothing so as he suspects and throws her arms around him and says words of love. While she is absorbed in her romantic fascination and love for the man in her arms, she utters, "Want me ! Take me. Adam." But she instantly becomes conscious of the name that has slipped from her tongue and feels that she is not worthy of love—she tells Peter that she cannot marry him. Peter also doubts whether

what Orin said about her affairs with Avahanni was true and to his discomfiture she lies to him that Orin was right. Peter is now confident that Orin, Hazel and her mother were right about their estimate of Lavinia's character. He hurries blindly off and Lavinia watches him go ; then she desperately cries after him, "Peter. It's a lie. I didn't—!" But it is too late—Peter is gone. Then she turns, as if she would enter the house, and Seth forbids her to go in but she grimly says that she is not going the way her mother and Orin went because they escaped punishment whereas there being none to punish her, she will punish herself by living alone with the dead. She announces that she will never go out and orders Seth to close the shutters and nail them tight and tell Hannah to throw out all the flowers. She ascends to the portico—and then turns and stands for a while, staring into the sunlight. Seth pulls the shutters closed and Lavinia pivots sharply on her heel and marches woodenly into the house, closing the door behind her.

19

Detailed Summary of Mourning Becomes Electra

(1) HOMECOMING

ACT I

Young Lovers : Waiting For Ezra

The play opens with the gossip of Seth Beckwith, Amos Ames and his wife Louisa and her cousin Minnie. From their talks it is learned that Brigadier-General Ezra Mannon is coming home. Their comments also reflect the characters of Ezra and his wife Christine. Christine appears on the stage and listens to the music of Seth's "Shenandoah" for a while ; shrugs her shoulders with disdain and walks off towards the flower garden. After a short while appears Lavinia Mannon, the daughter of Ezra Mannon. Seth gives a slight hint of the gossip about illicit relations between Christine and Captain Adam Brant. Meanwhile, Captain Peter Niles and his sister Hazel Niles come. Peter loves Lavinia and Hazel loves Orin Mannon, the brother of Lavinia. Peter and Hazel show their anxiety about Orin who has not sent any letter since long. Peter asks Lavinia whether Orin really loves Hazel to which Lavinia says that she does not know anything about love nor does she want to know and that she hates love. She says so because her mind is worried over her mother's affair with Adam. She has been to New York following Christine who had gone there the previous night to meet her lover, though ostensibly, to see her ailing father. Further, she tells Peter that she cannot marry him because her father needs her more. However, she will love Peter as a brother, she says. About Adam she says that he told her the story of his life to prove himself to be a romantic but she did not pay much attention to him.

The Story of David

Now Christine appears and Peter and Hazel go away. Christine has brought a bunch of flowers to brighten the tomb which she

finds to be looking like a sepulchre. By the way she tells Lavinia that she happened to see Adam in New York and that he is coming here Lavinia says to Christine that she has to talk to her and they decide to do so after the departure of Adam. Then Seth comes who tells her a lot about Adam particularly that Adam resembles her father, Orin and more especially, her grandfather's brother, David Mannon. Lavinia now recalls the story of David who loved a Canadian nurse, named Marie Brantome, whom he had to marry because she was going to have a baby. Her grandfather drove them out of the house and demolished it and built a new one (the present house) because he would not live in a house disgraced by David. Seth completes the story of David : After being driven away from his ancestral house, David married the nurse and went somewhere in the West. Later on it was heard that the nurse gave birth to a male child. They compare the number of years elapsed since that event and the age of Adam and come to the conclusion that the child born to the nurse must be Adam Brant.

Adam's Arrival

Adam comes. He tells Lavinia that Christine has told him that Lavinia loves her father more than her mother to which Lavinia says yes. He also tells her that she resembles her mother in every respect and that she is also like his mother. Adam appears to be making love to Lavinia as he has been advised by Christine to do so so that Lavinia may not suspect her mother's relations with him. He talks about the South Sea Islands and the clippers and the naked beautiful women there and their paradisal happy life.. Lavinia says that they might be having dirty dreams of love. When he makes gestures of love-making she scornfully says that it would be foolish to expect anything but cheap romantic lies from the son of a low Canadian nurse girl. Adam is enraged by her words and says that no Mannon can insult his mother while he is alive. The purpose of Lavinia is served—she has confirmed her suspicion about the parentage of Adam. He calls all the Mannons coward because they cannot face truth about themselves. He also tells the whole story of David and Marie Brantome and further adds that Lavinia's grandfather, Abe Mannon, also loved the Canadian nurse. He narrates the sad story of his mother—how she led a life of poverty and starvation. His father, instead of facing realities, took to drinking ; at one stage he was ashamed of Marie and withdrew himself from the world and Marie had to work hard and support the family. Once he beat Marie and in reaction Adam hit him and cut his head with a poker. Still his mother loved David who later on hanged himself. So Marie blamed Adam for David's killing himself. In spite of her best effort she could not educate Adam who ran away to sea at the age of seventeen and forgot that he had a mother except that he took part of her name. However, two years before, he came to her and found

that she was dying of starvation and sickness. She told him that being driven by deprivation she sunk her pride and wrote to Ezra to send her some money. But he never answered her. And she died in his arms. At that moment he swore on his mother's body that he would revenge her death on Ezra. Now it is clear to Lavinia that Christine is only Adam's means of revenge on Ezra. But Adam pretends not to understand the implications of Lavinia's indirect reference to Christine and feigns to love Lavinia. She turns at the top of the steps at this and stares at him with such a passion of hatred that he is silenced. Her lips move as if she were going to speak, but she fights back the words, turns swiftly and goes into the house and closes the door behind her.

ACT II

Christine Confesses Her Love For Adam

Above the fireplace in Ezra's study is a large portrait of Ezra painted ten years previously. There is a startling likeness between him and Adam. He is a tall man in his early forties wearing his judge's robe. His face is emotionless and has the same strange semblance of a life-like mask observable in the faces of Christine, Lavinia and Adam. Lavinia is discovered standing by the table. She is fighting to control herself, but her face is torn by a look of stricken anguish. She turns slowly to her father's portrait and for a moment stares at it fixedly. Then she goes to it and puts her hand over one of his hands with a loving, protecting gesture. While she is muttering "Poor Father" Christine comes and shows her displeasure at Lavinia's sending Annie to h[illegible] she was resting. Lavinia gets an opportunity to unburden her heart : she tells her mother that she saw Christine in New York with Adam and that her prètension of seeing her father was well known to everybody. In the beginning Christine refuses to admit her guilt but when Lavinia says that she saw her kissing Adam Christine confesses that she loves Adam. She has her own explanation of her relations with Adam : she has been living with Ezra as his wife even though she has been hating him ; before their marriage she found him handsome, silent, mysterious and romantic ; but marriage soon turned his romance into disgust. Lavinia is pained to learn that she was born of her mother's disgust. hence she says that she hates Christine. Christine says that she always felt that Lavinia was born of her father whereas about Orin she felt that he was only her child. She argues that she would not have loved Adam if Orin had been with her. When Orin had joined the army, she says, there was nothing left but hate and a desire to be revenged and a longing to be loved. And it was then that she met Adam. She saw that he loved her. Lavinia says that Adam does not love Christine but that the latter is only the former's "revenge on Father". She tells her mother her discovery of the parentage

of Adam. Christine, however, says that Adam told her everything about him when he said he loved her. At this Lavinia is enraged : "Oh ! And I suppose knowing who he was gave you all the more satisfaction –to add that disgrace !" She tells Christine threateningly that she deserves the worst punishment and that her father would disown Christine publicly no matter how much the scandal cost him. And she would like to see that Christine is punished ; but she thinks so not for the sake of her mother but for the sake of her father because he is not keeping well these days. She will not allow anybody to hurt him, rather she will try to protect him from her mother. On the request of her mother she agrees that she will not tell her father the story of Adam provided Christine gives up Adam and promises never to see him and to remain a dutiful wife and make up for the wrong she has done him.

Christine's Charge Against Lavinia

Christine thinks that Lavinia is sparing her not only for the sake of keeping the family from more scandal but because she herself "wanted" Adam. And now, because she knows that she cannot have him, she is determined that at least she will take him from Christine. She warns Lavinia that if she tells him about her affairs with Adam, she will go away with Adam. She divulges a long-hidden secret of her heart. "I've watched you ever since you were little, trying to do exactly what you're doing now ! You've tried to become the wife of your father and the mother of Orin ! You've always schemed to steal my place !" Lavinia has her own grievance : "No ! It's you who have stolen all love from me since the time I was born !" She once again asks Christine whether she is going to do what she has told her to or not. Christine takes one more opportunity to defeat Lavinia : she says that she can go off openly with Adam and all the pride and honour of the Mannons will go to the dust. But Lavinia is a hard nut to crack : she says that her father will use his influence and get Adam blacklisted so that he would lose his command and never get another. And her father would never divorce Christine and so she could never marry. The poor woman is defeated ; she agrees to do as Lavinia has said ; she will not see Adam again after he calls that evening. She again repeats her thesis that Lavinia loves Adam. But Lavinia says that she has always hated him. She tells Christine that she wrote to Ezra and Orin the moment she returned from New York that a Captain Brant had been calling and people had begun to gossip. To Christine all this means that she will be under the thumb of her own daughter for the rest of her life, that there is nothing she can do now but obey Lavinia's orders. Lavinia says that it is not her orders that she is to carry out but she should take it as her duty to her husband. She

tells her mother that Adam is waiting for her outside, that she should dismiss him by the time she comes back.

Adam and Christine Conspire

Adam and Christine tell each other in short what they have talked about to Lavinia. Then Adam asks whether Christine fell in love with him because his face resembled Ezra Mannon's. Christine answers that she loved him because it was Orin Adam made her think of. Then Adam comes forward with his malicious design : when he heard that Christine was the wife of Ezra Mannon, he hated her for being Ezra's. He thought he would take her from Ezra and that will be part of his revenge. And thus out of hatred came love. Christine requests Adam to take her away from Ezra. Adam says that when Ezra comes he will tell him frankly everything and take Christine away with him ; if Ezra will object to it, he will kill him. Christine says that he will be hanged for murdering the General. Then he suggests another plan : he will challenge Ezra to a duel and kill him. Christine again dismisses this plan as impractical because instead of fighting the duel, she says, Ezra will get Adam arrested. She requests him to stop thinking of his revenge for a while and think of her. If Ezra had only been killed, she says, they could be married now and she would bring to Adam her share of the Mannon estate. That would be justice. According to her, it is Adam's by right ; it is what Ezra's father stole from Adam's. All this convinces Adam. She further says that Adam would not have to worry about "commands" or ship owners' favour. He could buy his own ship and be his own master. Adam is lost in a reverie to imagine his future ; that has always been his dream to have his own clipper. Christine punctures his daydream by saying that Ezra is alive.

Christine's Plan

Then Christine makes a plan. She tells Adam that Ezra has been complaining of pains about his heart which, he told, was not a serious disease. But Christine let it be known that he had heart trouble. She asks Adam to bring a poisonous drug from Boston which she will give her husband when he will ask for his medicine. Adam does not approve of this plan because it is a coward's trick. Christine mocks at his being scrupulous about Ezra's death. She sneeringly says that it must be the Mannon in him coming out ; she fears that he is going to prove that he is a weak coward like his father. She provokingly makes an earnest appeal to the lover in Adam to save her from Ezra's claiming her as his wife : "If you love me as much as you claim, I should think that would rid you of any scruples ! If it was a question of some woman taking you from me, I wouldn't have qualms about which was or wasn't the way to kill her ! ... But perhaps your love has

been only a lie you told me—to take the sneaking revenge on him of being a backstairs lover!" These words sting Adam: "I'll do anything you want! ... I'm a damn fool to have any feeling about how Ezra Mannon dies!" Christine is extremely satisfied with Adam's new resolve; she is happy that she is loving a man who is not a hypocritical Mannon.

Ezra Arrives

Booms of cannon sound from the fort, announcing the arrival of Ezra Mannon. Christine once more reminds Adam to keep his promise and asks him to leave the Mannon House because Lavinia would be coming now. The cannon at the fort keep booming at regular intervals until the end of the scene. Brant goes away and Christine watches him for a short while. Then she turns back from the window. Her eyes are caught by the eyes of her husband in the portrait and for a moment she stares back into them, as if fascinated. Then she jerks her glance away and, with a little shudder she cannot repress, she turns and walks quickly from the room and closes the door behind her.

ACT III

Statue-Like Lavinia

It is around nine o'clock of a night a week later. Lavinia is sitting on the top of the steps to the portico, as if she were Egyptian statue. The sound of Seth's "Shenandoah" is heard from down the drive. Seth appears, a bit drunk but holding his liquor well. From him Lavinia elicits further information about Adam's mother, particularly about her physical features, hair etc. She was always laughing and singing—frisky and full of life—with something free and wild about her like an animal. And she was pretty too. The colour of her hair was just like Lavinia's mother's. He also corroborates David's disclosure that even Lavinia's father was infatuated in love with Marie Brantome. But Lavinia does not believe even now that her father can be such a man.

Of Victory and the Defeat of Death

Christine appears outlined in the light from the hall. She is dressed in a gown of green velvet. She stands a little to the right of Lavinia. Their faces strangely resemble. Lavinia does not turn or give any sign of knowing that her mother is behind her. Seth moves off left and goes away. Christine says to Lavinia that she being puritan maiden should not "peer too inquisitively into Spring" because for her beauty is abomination and love a vile thing. She

fears that Lavinia might be hatching some plot against her. Meanwhile, Ezra Mannon comes. Lavinia and Christine greet him in their own ways. When Lavinia expresses her sorrow at the assassination of the President and says that it is dreadful that he should die just at his moment of victory, Ezra says in a philosophical manner, "All victory ends in the defeat of death. But does defeat end in the victory of death ?" These words have a grave ironical undertone. Ezra tells them in short how Orin was wounded in the head and got brain fever from the shock and was in a rundown condition at the hospital. He further says that he is still weak and restless and that he was out of his head for a long time. He acted as if he were a boy and always remembered his mother. He warns Christine that when Orin comes home she should not "baby" her anymore. When Lavinia asks him about his heart trouble, he says that it has never been a serious disease and adds that his doctor has advised him to avoid worry or over-exertion or excitement. Christine advises him to go to bed but Lavinia insists on talking to him. She says that she would like to tell him all about Captain Brant. He asks Christine about the Captain and she tells him that Lavinia is in love with him. Lavinia, however, denies the charge and says that she believes Adam though Christine was flirting with him. She also refers to people gossiping about the matter. And finally she says that Ezra is the only man she will ever love. She goes in and Christine forces a gentle tone and asks her husband what it is he suspects her of. She tells him that since the moment he came here she has been feeling as if he were distrusting her and his eyes have been probing her, as if he were the judge and she a prisoner. And then she says frankly that perhaps he is accusing her of flirting with a stupid ship captain. Ezra tells her that it was foolish on her part to encourage Adam to visit her house and give the gossips a chance to be malicious. Christine's explanation is that she could not be so rude to him because he always brought her news of her father. Ezra seems to have been impressed by her words because he regrets to have been unjust to her. He kisses and caresses her and admires her beauty but she shrinks from his hand with a start of repulsion.

Ezra's Complaint

Ezra turns away, hurt and resentful at this rebuff, and stands looking at the trees. She stares at his back with hatred. He turns and sees her shut eyes, leans over her as if to kiss her, then is stopped by some strangeness he feels about her still face. He feels some burden of depression on him that he wants to throw off—he blurts out heavily : "I can't get used to home yet. It's so lonely... Don't keep your eyes shut like that.. I want to talk to you, Christine ! I've got to explain some things—inside me to my wife—..." He complains that her eyes have always been silent since they were married, though before that they did speak. So it

has been difficult for him to talk to her about his feelings. Christine's cold laconic reply is : "Don't talk. Ezra." Yet he continues : when he was face to face with death in the war he realized the importance of emotional communication because death was so common in the battlefield that love and other human values did not mean anything and, strangely enough, it all freed him to think of life ; death made him think of life ; before that life had only made him think of death. Preoccupation with death has been the Mannons' way of thinking, he says. Life was a dying ; being born was starting to die ; death was being born. He tells her his peculiar experience of life and death during the war : when he imagined he would be killed, it did not trouble him, but when he thought that a husband in him would die it seemed queer and wrong. Then the memories of the many years of his married life would crop up but nothing seemed to be clear except that there had always been some barrier between them. If there was anything that bound them it was hate that she nourished in her heart against him due to which he went to the Mexican War. When he came back home Orin was born to whom Christine turned her attention and so Ezra turned to Lavinia. But because Lavinia was his daughter and not his wife, he withdrew himself from his family and finding shipping insufficient to engross his attention, he became a judge and a mayor. People talked about his ability, but he himself found that he was not able to enjoy what he wanted most in his life. Christine does not deny anything. Now he says that he has come to surrender to her what is inside him and to prove that he has always loved her, though he has not been able to express it. Lavinia, who does not feel sleepy, appears at the edge of the portico. In an anguish of jealous hatred she says that she hates her mother because she stole her father's love from her and even now she is trying to deprive her of that love. She resolves to tell Ezra everything about Christine...When Ezra asks her why she is shouting she says that she forgot to say good night to him. Then Ezra goes back in the bedroom and pulls the shutter closed. Lavinia stands staring fascinatedly up at the window, wringing her hands in a pitiful desperation.

ACT IV

Ezra Realizes His Mistake

Ezra and Christine are not able to sleep. Christine thinks that Ezra might be asleep and so she slinks out of the bed quietly but Ezra calls her back. He tells her to light the light and talk for a while but she does not like the idea and says that she prefers the dark. However, he lights the candle on the stand and complains that she, perhaps, does not want to see an old man as her husband. Christine says that if he will talk such stupid things she will go in her room. She gets to her feet ; Ezra then requests her not to leave him alone. In spite of his repenting of

his bitterness in the past he is willing to love her and says that before their marriage he was not so. Christine does not remember anything of the past. She abruptly changes the topic and says that in the first part of the night Lavinia was pacing up and down before the house like a sentry guarding it and she did not go to bed until two. He feels a bit consoled and says that there is at least one who loves him. Then he instantly says that he is feeling strange. Christine, thinking of executing her impious plan, enquires if he has got heart trouble. This irritates him : "Is that what you're waiting for ?" He tells her that it is some sort of uneasiness troubling his mind—as if something in him was listening, watching, waiting for something to happen. Nothing seems to belong to him – neither the house nor the room nor the bed ; they seem to be empty –waiting for someone to move in ; he also feels that Christine is not his wife and that she is waiting for something, for death to set her free. Anger and hatred come into her voice : "You acted as if I were your wife—your property—not so long ago !" Ezra's reaction is full of bitter scorn : "Your body ? What are the bodies to me ? I've seen too many rotting in the sun to make grass greener. Ashes to ashes, dirt to dirt ! Is that your notion of love ? Do you think I married a body ?...You were lying to me tonight as you've always lied ! You were only pretending love. You let me take as if you were a nigger slave I'd bought at auction ! You made me appear a lustful beast in my own eyes !—as you've always done since our first marriage night ! I would feel cleaner now if I had gone to a brothel ! I would feel more honor between myself and life !" A few hours before he thought that his homecoming would mark a new beginning in their lives but now he realizes his foolishness to have disclosed the secret of his heart.

Christine Opens Her Cards

Christine now comes forward with her open card : Ezra has used her, she says ; he has given her children but she has never been his and for all this she holds Ezra responsible—she loved him when they were married and wanted to give herself in to him ; but it was he who made her so ; it was he who filled her heart with disgust. Not only this, she tells him everything about her affairs with Brant—that the Captain is Marie Brantome's son and that he came for her and not for Vinnie. To his great shock, she tells him that she has found in him everything that she wished to see in an ideal lover-husband—Adam is gentle and tender ; he is everything Ezra has never been ; he is what she has longed for all these years with her husband—a lover. She tells him frankly that she loves Adam. Ezra calls her a whore and threatens to kill her but he suddenly falls back groaning with intense pain. She hurries through the doorway into her room and immediately returns with a small box in her hand. Ezra does not notice her movement. He asks for medicine which is on the stand and Christine

who has taken a pellet from the box pretends to take something from the stand, then holds out the pellet and a glass of water and puts the pellet on his tongue and presses the glass of water to his lips. Ezra takes a swallow of water, then suddenly a wild look of terror comes over his face and he gasps and says : "That is not—my medicine." Christine shrinks back to the table, the hand with the box held out behind her, as if seeking a hiding place. Her fingers release the box on the table top and she brings her hand in front of her as if instinctively impelled to prove to him that she has nothing. Ezra's eyes are fixed on her in a terrible accusing glare. He tries to call for help but his voice fades to a wheezy whisper : "Help. Vinnie." He falls in a coma and Christine stares at him fascinatedly and frantically snatches up the box from the table and holds it behind her back and turns to face the door as it opens and Lavinia appears in the doorway.

Lavinia's Dream

Lavinia says that she has had a terrible dream and that she thought her father called and woke her up. Christine tells her that Ezra just had an attack, though now he is alright. Ezra gasps but struggles to say something, the last words being, "She is guilty—not medicine" and dies. Then Christine says : "I hope—he rests in peace." Lavinia turns to her in hatred and tells her that she wanted him to die and asks why Ezra pointed at Christine like that and said that she was guilty. Christine admits that she told him that she loved Adam. Lavinia is aghast to learn it : "You told him that—when you knew his heart—! Oh ! You did it on purpose ! You murdered him !" Christine accuses Lavinia for making Ezra suspicious and forcing her to tell him all about Adam. Lavinia's another question is what Ezra meant by "not medicine". But Christine says she does not know anything and asks if Lavinia wants to accuse her of murdering Ezra. She falls in a dead faint at the foot of the bed and the poison is stretched out behind her. As her hand strikes the floor the fingers relax and the box slips out onto one of the hooked rugs. Lavinia, after confirming by feeling the pulse of Christine that she has only fainted, again starts accusing her mother of murdering Ezra so that she might be free to marry Adam. However, she tells Christine that her dream will never materialize until she is alive. She expresses her determination to get Christine punished. She is starting to her feet when her eyes fall on the box which she snatches up. She looks at it with suspicion which turns into certainty. With the box in hand she sinks on her knees and flings her arms around the dead body of her father and cries : "Father ! Don't leave me alone ! Come back to me ! Tell me what to do !"

(2) THE HUNTED

ACT I

Town as a Human Background

In the beginning we meet the types of townsfolk, a chorus representing the town as a human background for the drama of the Mannons. They are Josiah Borden and his wife, Everett Hills, the Congregational minister, and his wife, and Doctor Joseph Blake, the Mannons' family physician. It is two days after the murder of Ezra Mannon. Through them we learn a lot about the reactions of Christine and Lavinia to the death of Ezra. Mrs Borden says that Christine is broken down over her husband's death and looks terrible while Lavinia is cold and calm as an icicle. Blake and Hills point out the greatness of Ezra as one of the Mannons but Mrs. Hills breaks in tactlessly : "You remember, Everett, you've always said about the Mannons that pride goeth before a fall and that some day God would humble them in their sinful pride." Everyone stares at her, shocked and irritated. Blake says that he has strong suspicion that it was love that killed Ezra.

A Ghostly, Dead House

All these persons go off and Christine comes. She is obviously in a terrible state of strained nerves. Then comes Hazel out of the house. Christine forces a smile on her face and says that she must not look haggard and old when Orin comes because he always liked her to be pretty. She expresses her wish to see that Orin marries Hazel and warns her to be cautious of Lavinia who, she says, is very possessive with Orin and jealous of Hazel. She also says that Lavinia will do everything to keep Orin from marrying Hazel. After promising Hazel to help her marry Orin she seeks a similar promise from Hazel to help her see that Orin does not come under Lavinia's influence. She is horrified at Lavinia's silence and her following her everywhere. Her state of mind is reflected in her words addressed to Hazel in answer to her comment that Christine is genuinely good and pure of heart : "I was like you once—long ago - before—... If I could have stayed as I was then !" Her further words reflect her character : "Why can't all of us remain innocent and loving and trusting ? But God won't leave us alone. He twists and wrings and tortures our lives with others' lives until—we poison each other to death !" She proposes to Hazel to go in because she hates moonlight which, she says, makes everything so haunted. Both of them go into the house. After a while Orin comes along with Peter Niles and Lavinia. One is struck by his startling family resemblance to Ezra Mannon and Adam Brant. He searches for his mother hoping that she must be waiting for him. While he is standing staring at the house, he is visited by the memory of his dream of

coming home and says that he thought it would never end and he and other armymen would go on murdering and being murdered until no one was left alive. He is glad that he has come home, though he still thinks that he is dreaming of coming home. The house looks to him to be strange, ghostly and dead.

Orin's Inheritance

Orin cannot believe that his father is dead. He recalls to Lavinia his experience of war under the command of his father : "I hardened myself to expect my own death and everyone else's, and think nothing of it. I had to—to keep alive ! It was part of my training as a soldier under him. He taught it to me, you might say !" But this does not mean that he is unfeeling, as Lavinia says. His mind is still full of ghosts, he says. He cannot grasp anything but war, in which his father was so alive. He was the war to him—the war that would never end until Orin died. Orin cannot understand peace—his father's end.

Orin wants to gather from Lavinia more information about Brant but Lavinia says that she will tell him everything later on. For the time being she warns him to be on his guard and not to allow Christine to baby him the way she used to and get him under her thumb again. She also advises him not to believe the lies their mother will tell him. In the meantime, the front door of the house is opened and Christine hurries out. For a moment mother and daughter stare into each other's eyes. Then Christine seems to be scared by the ceaseless spying on her by Lavinia. She pleads that she has been a good wife for over twenty three years—until she met Adam. She was guilty then, she confesses and says that she repented and put Adam out of her life ; she would have been a good wife as long as Ezra had lived, she says. She makes an earnest appeal to Lavinia, as her mother, to have so feeling for her. But Lavinia still stares at her, frozen and silent. Fear creeps into Christine's tone ; she again asks Lavinia why she is staring at her like that and expresses her doubt that Lavinia is still having her suspicion about her relation with Adam. She says that she has missed some medicine she takes to put her to sleep and asks Lavinia whether she has found it. She fears that Lavinia might connect it with death of Ezra and poison Orin's mind against her and go to the police. Lavinia is all the time silent ; she walks slowly and Christine stares after her and trembles with dread. From inside the house comes the sound of Orin's voice calling "Mother ! Where are you ?" Christine starts and immediately by an effort of will regains control over herself. She hurries up the steps and opens the door. She speaks to Orin and her voice is tensely quiet and normal : "Here I am, dear !" She shuts the door behind her.

ACT II

The Bleak House

The opening scene of this act follows immediately the close of the preceding one. The sitting room of the Mannon House is bleak and without intimacy. In the beginning Hazel and Peter talk about the tortured condition of Christine, Lavinia and Orin. From the hall Orin is heard calling "Mother! Where are you?" Hazel and Peter stop talking as Orin and Christine come. The mother shows her happiness at the arrival of her son and anxiety about his head injury. But Orin's mind is still occupied with the memory of his father ; he feels as if Ezra would be alive, though he finds everything in the house changed in some queer way. Christine shivers but does not answer. Now he starts talking about his trip which was not a pleasant one—throughout the period he suffered from headache. However, he is happy to come home and live with his mother whom he finds more beautiful and young than ever. Lavinia appears in the doorway and keeps her eyes fixed on her mother and Orin. She keeps on standing there while Christine, Orin and Hazel talk and after sometime she calls in Orin in a commanding tone to see the dead body of Ezra. This angers Christine who wishes Orin stay with her. Orin says to Christine : "Of course, Mother ! You come before everything !" Lavinia starts to make a bitter retort but remarks evenly : "Very well. Only remember what I said, Orin." She disappears across the hall and Orin gives a sidelong glance of uneasy suspicion. Christine desperately tries to appear calm. After a few minutes Hazel and Peter go and Christine and Orin start talking about the Niles. Orin asks why his mother is so anxious to marry him off to Hazel and get rid of him. He complains that she has been indifferent towards him to the extent that she did not send letters to him. And abruptly he bursts forth with a big question : "Who is this Captain Brant who's been calling on you ?"

Christine's Lie

Christine tells a lie that Brant has been visiting Lavinia and that Lavinia must have written to him that Brant has some relations with Christine. Christine appeals to him to remain hers because, she says, he is really her flesh and blood, though Lavinia is her father's, and not hers. Orin agrees to her view. She wants to obviate from Orin's mind the memory of his father by filling in his heart a feeling of hatred against him : "I want to make up to you for all the injustice you suffered at your father's hands." She says that Ezra hates Orin because she loved her son better than anything in the world. She poisons his mind so much against the dead man that he admits to her that he is not sorry at his father's death. She is glad to win her game and now she wants to be sure that Orin will not listen to Lavinia's "lies" about her. Orin feels uneasy again and

asks about the Adam affairs. Christine again elaborates her old thesis that Lavinia is a girl of morbid revengeful mind, a moody and strange girl who has gone a little out of her mind so that she would say the most terrible things about everyone. And with the shock of her father's death she has grown insane and that is why she talks queer things. All this, she says, has led to Lavinia's hatred for Christine, Adam affair being an example. She narrates her concocted version of the story of her meeting Adam at her father's house, his visit to the Mannon House uninvitingly, Lavinia's falling in love with him and subsequent discovery that "he wasn't after her at all", etc. Orin puts a sharp question. "Who was he after — you ?"—to which she says that she being a mother of two grown up children cannot be expected to do such nasty things. Realizing her succeess at every step she wants to assure success on another issue also - on the issue of Adam's parentage which she wants to hide. She says to Orin not to believe Lavinia's statement that Adam is Marie Brantome's son. She further warns him that Lavinia would falsely accuse Christine of being in love with Adam and of poisoning Ezra and shows her apprehension that her daughter might even inform the police about it. So she implores Orin not to let Lavinia turn him against her because, she says, he is all she has to protect her, he is all she has in the world.

Orin's Assurance

Orin assures her that Lavinia won't try to turn him against his mother. As for Lavinia's going to the police, he says, he would try to prevent her for the sake of the family, his own sake and Lavinia's too, as well as for Christine's. It does not matter what Christine ever did because he loves her better than anything in the world ; he can forgive anything in his mother except the scandal about Adam. The last words of Orin terrify her ; she says distractedly, "For God's sake, don't talk like that ! You're not my Orin ! You're cruel and horrible. You frighten me !" He then tells her that they should now talk about something else and starts telling her about his longing to be here with his mother and the peace that can be experienced in the South Sea Islands.

South Sea Islands

He refers to the book "Typee" dealing with the description of the South Sea Islands, and is lost in reproducing the beauty of nature in the Islands as described in the book. He tells her that when he was out of his head he seemed really to be there. He felt that there was no one but his mother and him ; the breaking of the waves was her voice ; the sky was the same colour as her eyes ; the warm sand was like her skin ; the whole island was she. And finally he tells her that he will never leave her again now and

that he does not want Hazel or anyone because she is his "only girl". Christine, however, reminds him of his boyhood days when she lovingly took his care and says that she still considers him to be the same boy. Orin is happy to be reminded of those days and expresses his wish to marry Lavinia to Peter and then live with his mother happily. Then Lavinia slips in and calls Orin to see the dead body of Ezra. He hurries out past Lavinia with the air of one with a disagreeable duty he wants to get over quickly and closes the door behind him. Lavinia stares at Christine and then follows Orin but Christine calls her and says that she has herself told Orin the whole story of Adam scandal and that Lavinia is insane to accuse her mother of adultery though she herself loved Adam. She also tells her that Orin won't like Lavinia's reporting the case of Ezra's murder to the police because it would involve the respect of the Mannons. She threatens her to disgrace her in the eyes of the world : "I'll show you to the world as a daughter who desired her mother's lover and then tried to get her mother hanged out of hatred and jealousy." Lavinia trembles though her face remains emotionless.

Christine's Recklessness

Christine seems to be drunk with her own defiant recklessness. She says to Lavinia that Orin loves her and hates his father and that he is glad that the old man is dead. Even if Orin comes to know, she says, that she has murdered Ezra, he will protect her. Then all her defiant attitude collapses and she pleads, seized by a hysterical terror, by some fear she has kept hidden : "For God's sake, keep Orin out of this ! He's still sick ! He's changed ! He's grown hard and cruel ! All he thinks of is death ! Don't tell him about Adam ! He would kill him ! I couldn't live then. I would kill myself !" Lavinia starts and her eyes light up with a cruel hatred. Her pale lips part as if she were about to say something but she controls the impulse and about-faces abruptly and walks with jerky steps from the room like some tragic mechanical doll. Christine stares after her—then as she disappears, collapses, catching at the table for support and exclaims : "I've got to see Adam ! I've got to warn him !" She sinks in the chair.

ACT III

Death Becomes the Mannons

Ezra Mannon's dead body is laid out in his study on a bier. His mask-like face is a startling reproduction of the face in the portrait above him, but grimly remote and austere in death. Orin is standing by the head of the bier. His face bears a striking resemblance to that of the portrait above him and the dead man's. He is ashamed and feels guilty of nourishing thoughts about his father's murder as

told by Lavinia. He wants to drive these thoughts from his mind because he feels they are nonsense. Lavinia appears silently in the doorway and stands looking at him but he does not notice her entrance.' He stares at his father's face and addresses it with a strange friendly mockery : "Who are you ? Another corpse ! You and I have seen fields and hillsides sown with them—and they meant nothing !—nothing but a dirty joke life plays on life !" He smiles dryly and says : "Death sits so naturally on you. Death becomes the Mannons. You were always like a statue of an eminent dead man—sitting on a chair in a park or straddling a horse in a town square—looking over the head of life without a sign of recognition—cutting it dead for the impropriety of living !" He chuckles to himself with a queer affectionate amusement : "You never cared to know me in life—but I really think we might be friends now you are dead !" Lavinia is shocked to hear these words of Orin : "I wouldn't believe you could have grown so callous to all feeling of respect." Orin feels guilty and resentful and starts talking about his experience of death at the front where he took it as a joke. About his father's face he says that it is that of the same familiar stranger he has never known. He tells her that in the army Ezra was known as Old Stick—short for Stick-in-the-Mud because he trusted in holding a position "until hell froze over". Lavinia tells him that when their father came home he boasted that Orin had fought bravely in the war. But he punctures her enthusiastic admiration for him by telling her that though he always volunteered for extra danger, he was scared by it.

Effect of War

The repercussion of the war on his mind is that he has developed a queer idea about the war : "I had a queer feeling that war meant murdering the same man over and over, and that in the end I would discover the man was myself ! Their faces keep coming back in dreams—and they change to Father's face—or to mine—." He is, however, unable to understand the meaning of all this. The war is over, but, he says, the war inside them who killed has not ended. He also narrates how he got injury in his head and went mad. He dismisses this topic and the memory of what Christine has said rushes over him. He chides Lavinia for harbouring evil ideas about their mother. Lavinia is bewildered to feel that Christine has succeeded in befooling him. She tries to revive in his heart his love for him that she once enjoyed and tells him that she has not lied to him. He then says that he won't listen to her any more if she talks about Christine. Lavinia then threatens to go to the police as a last resort, though, she says, she is well aware of the fact that the memory of their father and that of all the Mannons will be dragged in the murder trial. But she is ready to suffer that than let the murderer of Ezra go unpunished. And then she accuses Christine of murdering Ezra. She quotes Ezra's last words—"She's guilty"—to prove her point. Orin can't

believe her and so he expresses his old grievance : "He always sided with you against Mother and me." He calls her a crazy insane girl and snatches from her hands the box and slips it into his coat pocket. Lavinia accuses him of still being a crybaby that Christine can make a fool of whenever she pleases. Orin says that his mother means a thousand times more to him than his father ever did. Lavinia then says that if he cannot help her punish Christine, she does not hope that he is willing to let her lover escape. She tells him that it was he who plotted in collaboration with Christine to murder Ezra. Orin is still under the influence of his mother so that he cannot believe Lavinia. Lavinia tells him that she herself saw Christine kissing Adam in New York and saying that she loved him Orin's anger against Lavinia goes on increasing but a point comes when he tells her to prove her charge. He also promises to kill Adam if Lavinia proves it. Lavinia expresses her surmise that being frightened out of her wits Christine will go to Adam and then Orin and Lavinia may catch them. She takes the box from Orin's pocket and puts it conspicuously on Ezra's dead body and requests Orin to watch Christine when she sees it—this being her first authentic proof.

Bewildered Christine

Christine, who has been calling Orin, almost falls in when Orin opens the door. She is in a state bordering on collapse. She throws her arms around Orin as if seeking protection from him. She looks in his face and says : "Why do you look at me like that ? You look— so like—your father !" She confirms whether Lavinia still insists on going to the police and asks Orin not to allow Lavinia to do like that. Orin feels her guilt and stammers : "No, Mother." She points out that his father won't like any scandal and that he needs rest and peace. Addressing the dead body, she says : "You seem the same to me in death, Ezra ! You were always dead to me ! I hate the sight of death. I hate the thought of it !" Her eyes shift from his face and she sees the box of poison. She starts back with a stifled scream and stares at it with guilty fear. To Orin all is clear now. He regrets to have come home for seeking an escape from death, for having come back to life from his Island of peace. He is sorry that the dream of his Island that was his mother is lost. Lavinia snatches up the box and Christine looks wildly at her frozen accusing face. Lavinia asks Christine whether Adam had given that medicine to her which the latter denies. Lavinia puts the box back in the bosom of her dress and Christine appeals to Orin to stop Lavinia from harming Adam and confesses that it is only she who is guilty. Then, as if she reads some answer in the dead man's face, she stops in terror and, her eyes still fixed on his face, backs to the door and rushes out.

ACT IV

Wreaking Vengeance

The scene is the stern of a clipper ship moored alongside a wharf in East Boston. It is a night two days after Act II—the day following Ezra Mannon's funeral. Adam is discovered here, cursing the chantyman for singing a sad chanty. Ironically enough, he says to the chantyman that he has a foreboding that he will never take this ship to sea He thinks so because, he says, the sea does not like a coward like him who is hiding himself behind a woman's skirt. At the same moment Christine appears, dressed in black and heavily veiled and asks Adam to go back to the gangplank where she will meet him .....Since the moment he read the news of Ezra's death three days ago, he says, he has been feeling too nervous. Christine tells her own agonizing story of Lavinia's knowledge of Ezra's death by poison. Adam apprehends that Lavinia may again follow her, as she has done previously. But Christine drives away his fear - she says that Orin and Lavinia have gone to their cousins at Blackridge and further that she has made Orin think that Lavinia is out of her head with grief so that he will not believe her words. Now she warns Adam of the danger to his life from Orin. He takes her to the cabin for fear of being seen by anyone. Then Orin and Lavinia come in stealthily along the deck.

Murder is Out

In the cabin Christine tells the whole story of Ezra's murder ; she also tells him that when Ezra was dying he pointed at her and said that she was guilty and afterwards Lavinia found the poison. Adam is overcome by gloomy dejection and says in a mood of regret that it was not that kind of revenge he had sworn on his mother's body ; he should have rather fought with Ezra as two men fight for the love of a woman. With bitter self-contempt he says that he has his father's rotten coward blood in him, perhaps. Chris ne fears that Lavinia may succeed in convincing Orin with her argument and proof that their mother has murdered their father and therefore she advises Adam to run away somewhere. Adam agrees to her proposal and plans to get seats in the "Atlantis" and tells Christine to see him again on Thursday. He also tells her that he has decided to give up the job of a seaman because the sea hates a coward. Then she is reminded of the description of the South Sea Islands of Adam as well as of the Island of Orin. She says that once they are on Adam's Blessed Islands they will be happy. With the mention of the Islands Adam is lost in the memory of the imagined pleasures to be had on the Islands. There is peace and forgetfulness for them if they can find them, he says. From the deck Orin and Lavinia see Christine and Adam going out to the alleyway. Lavinia is well satisfied to show the proof of her mother's character.

Orin is now infuriated : "I'm not anxious to be hanged for that skunk !......I heard her asking him to kiss her ! I heard her warn her against me !......And my Island I told her about—which was she and I—she wants to go there—with him !"

Orin Shoots Adam

A few minutes later Adam appears in the doorway and stands inside it. Orin steps through the door and shoots Adam dead. He smashes open everything in the stateroom so as to make it look as if thieves have killed Adam and quickly turns Adam's pockets inside out and puts the revolver, watch and chain and other things he finds and puts them in his own with a plan to throw them in the sea later on. He looks at the face of Adam which looks like Ezra's and utters as if he were talking to himself, "This is like my dream. I've killed him before—over and over." Then he says to Lavinia : "Do you remember telling how the faces of the men I killed came back and changed to Father's face and finally became my own ?...... He looks like me, too ! Maybe I've committed suicide !" Lavinia asks him to make haste and then he says that if he had been in the place of Adam he would have also done what Adam did—he would have also loved her as Adam loved her and killed Ezra too—for her sake. The whole episode seems to be queer and a dirty joke on someone. He lets Lavinia hustle him out to the alleyway.

ACT V

The News of Adam's Death

The scene opens on the following night on the exterior of the Mannon house. Christine is discovered walking back and forth on the drive before the portico. She is in a frightful state of tension, unable to keep still. Hazel comes whom Christine has called for inquiring whether she or Peter has heard anything from Orin and Lavinia who have not returned from Blackridge till now. She requests Hazel to wake her if she gets asleep. A moment later Orin and Lavinia come up the drive. Orin tells Christine that he and Lavinia followed their mother when she called on her lover in his cabin. He also tells her that he heard her warning Adam against her own son. And finally he shocks her by informing her that he has killed Adam. But she does not believe his words and says that he is saying so just for the purpose of punishing her. She reminds him of his promise to love her, to protect her and pleads that he can't murder her. Orin's curt reply is "You could murder Father, couldn't you ?" Then he shows the newspaper in which there has appeared a news about the death of Adam and burglary in his cabin as he and Lavinia planned the police should think. His every word is full of rancour : he does not like that his mother should

grieve for Adam whom he calls a "servant's bastard". He further says : "I know he was the one who planned father's murder ! You couldn't have done that ! He got you under his influence to revenge himself ! He hypnotized you ! I saw you weren't yourself the minute I got home, remember ? How else could you ever have imagined you loved that low swine ! How else could you ever have said the things... I heard you planning to go with him to the Island —that was you and I." He feels that she is still under Adam's influence and therefore he admonishes her and tells her to forget the dead Captain. He promises to make her happy with his love when he will take her to the South Sea Islands. But she does not give any sign of having heard him. He shakes her desperately and says : "Why won't you speak to me ? Will you always love him ? Do you hate me now ? ... Mother ! Answer me ! Say you forgive me !" Lavinia reprimands him with bitter scorn : "After all that's happened, are you becoming her crybaby again... Leave her alone. Go in the house." As he hesitates, she commands more sharply, "Do you hear me ? March !" He walks mechanically up the steps, gazing up at the house strangely. He goes into the house ; Lavinia comes and stands beside her mother whose face has become a tragic death mask. Lavinia regards her with bleak, condemning eyes and says : "He paid the just penalty for his crime." Christine shrinks backward and Lavinia makes a motion as if to hold her back. She calls shakenly, "Mother ! What are you going to do ? You can live !"

Christine's Suicide

Christine glares as if this were the last insult and utters with strident mockery, "Live !" She bursts into shrill laughter, stops abruptly, raises her hands between her face and her daughter and pushes them out in a gesture of blotting Lavinia forever from her sight. Then she turns and rushes into the house. Lavinia again makes a movement to follow her. But she immediately fights down this impulse and turns her back on the house determinedly, standing square-shouldered and stiff like a grim sentinel in black. From the street comes the sound of Seth's "Shenandoah". And instantly there is the sharp report of a pistol from the ground floor of the house—Christine has shot herself with Ezra's pistol. Orin sees that she is dead. With a feeling of tortured self-accusation he cries out that he drove her to death because he wanted to torture her. He is sorry that she could not forgive him and repents of having boasted of having killed Adam. Lavinia tries to quiet him but he tears her hand away and regrets not to have let his mother believe that burglars killed him. He believes that in that case she would not have hated him and would have turned to him. And then he says that he himself has murdered her. Lavinia again unsuccessfully tries to calm him down but he frantically tries to break away from her and says : "Let me go ! I've got to find her ! I've to make her forgive me !"

He suddenly breaks down and weeps. He says again, "But she is dead—She's gone—how can I ever get her to forgive me now ?" Lavinia speaks to him soothingly, "Ssshh ! Ssshh ! You have me, haven't you ? I love you. I'll help you to forget." He goes back into the house. Lavinia sends Seth to call for Doctor Blake and tell him about the suicide of Christine and she herself follows Orin into the house.

(3) THE HAUNTED

ACT I : SCENE I

Chorus Characters

The scene opens on an evening of a clear day in summer a year later. All the shutters of the Mannon house are closed and the front door is boarded up, showing that the house is unoccupied. We meet again a group of persons whom O'Neill calls a chorus of types representing the town as a human background for the drama of the Mannons. In addition to Seth Beckwith and Amos Ames of the *Homecoming* other members of the chorus are Abner Small, Joe Silva and Ira Mackel. From them we gather a lot of information about the major characters. They drink and sing and jest and pass casual remarks which further develop the plot of the play. Small says that the ghost of Christine haunts the house ; through Seth we learn that Orin and Lavinia have gone to China ; Mackel doubts the rumour spread by Lavinia that Christine killed herself because she could not bear the shock of her husband's death. Meanwhile, Peter and Hazel come and Peter informs them that Orin and Lavinia have landed in New York. Suddenly Small reaches them terrifiedly and says that he has seen the ghost of Ezra dressed like a judge coming through the wall. Seth comments that there has been evil in this house since it was first built in hate and it has kept growing here ever since. He advises Peter to persuade Orin and Lavinia not to live in a haunted house.

Change in Lavinia

Lavinia comes—her body has filled out ; her movements have lost their square-shouldered stiffness ; she now bears a striking resemblance to her mother in every respect, even to being dressed in the green her mother had affected. She walks to the clump of lilacs and stands there staring at the house. She turns back and calls Orin in the tone one would use to a child. Orin comes slowly and hesitatingly, carrying himself woodenly erect like a soldier. He wears a close-cropped beard in addition to his moustache and this accentuates his resemblance to his father. The Mannon semblance of his face in repose to a mask is more pronounced than ever. He has grown dreadfully thin and his black

suit hangs loosely on his body. His haggard swarthy face is set in a blank lifeless expression. Lavinia, in a motherly tone, encourages him to be brave and capable of facing every situation to which he says that he will be all right with her. Lavinia is glad to hear these words, "That's all I wanted—to hear you say that. Seeing that Orin is still keeping his eyes averted from the house, Lavinia says, "Why don't you look at the house ? Are you afraid ? She takes his arm and leads him to the steps He walks like an automaton. When they reach the spot where his mother had sat moaning, the last time he had seen her alive, Orin stammers, "It was here—she—the last time I saw her alive—." Lavinia quickly urges him on commandingly, "That is all past and finished ! The dead have forgotten us ! We've forgotten them. Come ! " He obeys woodenly. She gets him up the steps and they pass into the house.

ACT I : SCENE II

The Ubiquitous Portraits

The sitting room of the Mannon house has the dead appearance of a room long shut up, and the covered furniture has a ghostly look. In the flickering candlelight the eyes of the Mannon portraits stare with a grim forbiddingness. Lavinia appears in the doorway. In the lighted room, the change in her is strikingly apparent. At a first glance, one would not miss her physical features, dress, gestures and movement resembling her mother's in Act I of *Homecoming*. Her eyes are caught by the eyes of the Mannons in the portraits and she approaches as if compelled in spite of herself until she stands directly under them in front of the fireplace. She suddenly addresses them in a harsh resentful voice, "Why do you look at me like that ? I've done my duty by you ! That's finished and forgotten !" She turns away but finding that Orin is not behind her, she hurries tow rds the door and calls him. He appears in the doorway. His face wears a dazed expression and his eyes have a wild, stricken look. He tells her that he has been in the study because he felt that his mother would be waiting for him there. But she was not there nor anywhere, else. Pointing to the portraits he says that they are everywhere Again he says that his mother is gone forever and she will never forgive him. Then there is a sudden turn to bitter resentful defiance in his voice ; "Well, let her go. Who is she to me ? I'm not her son any more ! I'm Father's ! I'm a Mannon ! And they'll welcome me home !"

Lavinia Consoles Orin

Lavinia tries to soothe him and tells him that he frightens her when he acts so strangely. Orin is now deeply moved by these words of Lavinia : "God knows I don't, Vinnie ! You're all

I have in the world !" Finding some signs of Orin coming to good terms with her Lavinia suggests that what they need most is to get back to simple normal things and begin a new life. She also hopes that their friendship and love relations with Peter and Hazel will help them more than anything to forget the recent tragic events. Orin is again assailed by the terror of his guilt-consciousness, "What right have I—or you—to love ?", he says. Lavinia says that they have every right. Then Orin says that their mother also felt so and that Lavinia has become in many respects much akin to their mother—her soul has become like Christine's, as if Lavinia were stealing Christine's soul, as if Christine's death had set Lavinia free to become her. Lavinia is worried over Orin's morbid spells because previously he had told her that since they left the Islands he did not have any morbid spells and only then she agreed to come home. But Orin says that he said so because he considered it his "brotherly duty" to get her away from the Islands. On the contrary, Lavinia says that she accompanied him to the Islands for his sake. For months after they sailed, she says, Orin did not know what he was doing. She had to live in constant fear of what he might say. She reminds him that this homecoming is what he wanted because he told her that if he could come home and face his ghosts, he could rid himself forever of his guilt about the past. She wants him to start again by facing all his ghosts right now. And she starts recounting the past events leading to the death of Ezra and Christine and convinces Orin that their mother was an adulteress and murderess whom law ought to have punished but they protected her. She further says that Christine chose to kill herself as punishment for her crime and Orin had nothing to do with it. Thus she proves that his feeling of being responsible for Christine's death was only his morbid imagination from which, she hopes, he will never suffer. And Orin agrees to it. However, the strength she has willed into him has left her exhausted ; in too weak a voice, she says, "There ! You see ! You can do it when you will to !" She kisses him. He breaks down, sobbing weakly against her breast. She soothes him.

Lavinia : A Ghost of Her Mother

Peter comes ; he is startled at the sight of Lavinia who he thinks, is the ghost of her mother. Lavinia stares at him with a strange eager possessiveness. They talk in a romantic fashion until Peter points out that Lavinia, who has been wearing black clothes, is now "dressed in color". Lavinia promptly says that when she wore black clothes she was dead. Peter then meets Orin and tells him that Lavinia has become romantic under the influence of the dark and deep blue ocean and of the Islands. Here he remarks that the Islands which he imagined to be his and Lavinia's as well proved to be hers only ; they only made him sick and the naked women disgusted him. He conjectures that he is too much of a Mannon to turn into a pagan whereas about Lavinia he says that though in the beginning she was shocked by their dances, gradually she fell in love with the Islanders.

He feared if he had stayed there another month, Lavinia would have also started dancing with the natives—"as naked as the rest". However, she despatches him to Hazel and starts playing romance with Peter. She tells Peter that Orin is still suffering from the shock of war and of the deaths of his parents. She also tells him that Orin keeps on teasing her that she was flirting with one of the natives simply because he used to smile at her when she smiled back. She expresses her gratitude to Orin for his making her dream of marrying Peter. She recapitulates the memory of the Islands : "I loved those Islands. They finished setting me free. There was something there mysterious and beautiful—a good spirit—of love—coming out of the land and sea. It made me forget death. There was no hereafter There was only this world—the warm earth in the moonlight—the trade wind in the coco palms—the surf on the reef—the fires at night and the drum throbbing in my heart—the natives dancing naked and innocent—without knowledge of sin !" She is lost in the reverie of love : she requests Peter to hold her close to him and says that love is all beautiful. She tells him her plan to settle in the country after their marriage and to make an Island of their own ; she dreams of begetting children whom they would teach them to love. About Orin they both decide that they will keep him with them. Lavinia tells Peter that Orin thinks that he is responsible for the death of Christine. She requests Peter to apprise her of the condition of Orin so that she may make allowances for any crazy thing he might say. She kisses Peter and as she does so, Hazel and Orin appear in the doorway. Orin starts as if he had been struck. He glares at them with jealous rage and clenches his fists as if he were going to attack them. However, Orin congratulates them and says that he is glad that they are happy. Peter takes his hand awkwardly ; Hazel moves towards Lavinia to greet her, her face full of an uneasy bewilderment. Lavinia stares at Orin with eyes full of dread.

ACT II

Crime and Punishment

On an evening a month later Orin is sitting in his father's chair writing by the light of a lamp. He has aged in the intervening month. He looks almost as old now as his father in the portrait. He is dressed in black and the semblance between the two is uncanny. Addressing the portrait he sardonically puts a question whether it is demanding the whole truth. But he fears that the neighbours will look down upon the family if they know the whole truth. There is a knock on the door. He hastily grabs the script and puts it in the drawer of the desk. Lavinia enters and he poses to have been reading a book. She is obviously concealing beneath a surface calm a sense of dread and desperation. On her enquiry Orin tells that he has been reading his father's law books because he is considering to study law. But Lavinia does not believe his words because she doubts something otherwise. Really she has sufficient ground for

her doubt : Orin has acted so funny lately, locking himself in the study with blinds closed and the lamp burning even in the daytime whereas it is expected of a normal man to get out in the fresh air at this hour. Orin has his own explanation—he hates daylight, he says. It is like an accusing eye to him ; he feels that he and Lavinia have renounced the day in which normal people live, or rather it has renounced them ; he feels that perpetual night—the darkness of death in life—is the fitting habitat for guilt which he thinks he has committed. Lavinia may think that she can escape but he can't. Lavinia is sorry that he is again becoming stupid. He is again lost in his morbid thinking : "And I find artificial light more appropriate for my work—man's light, not God's—man's feeble striving to understand himself, to exist for himself in the darkness ! It's a symbol of his life—a lamp burning out in a room of waiting shadows !" He says that he is studying the law of crime and punishment. His being 'mysterious' troubles Lavinia ; she does not like that Orin should sit in the suffocating room. She is feeling nervous tonight and, moreover, Orin's incessant brooding over the past worries her badly. Orin complains to her that she does not leave him alone with Hazel for a minute even when they are engaged because he feels that Lavinia fears Orin will let something slip. But the next moment he says that he is afraid of himself of being too alone with Hazel—afraid of himself. He is drawn to her purity but her love for him makes him appear less vile to himself. Then with a harsh laugh he says that Hazel's love makes him vile in his own eyes because when he sees in her eyes love for a murderer his guilt crowds up in his throat like poisonous vomit and he longs to spit it out and confess. Lavinia tells him that she also fears that he may say something about the past before someone. Orin promptly reacts and says that she should not hope to escape retribution, rather she should confess and atone for her crime ; he also says that his father has been always telling him to do so. Lavinia wants to wash his guilty conscience because she feels that he is becoming her guilty conscience too. She wonders how Orin can still love Christine after knowing her vileness. Orin tells her that he finds no difference between Lavinia and Christine because Lavinia also wants to leave him and marry Peter just as Christine planned to leave him and marry Adam.

History of the Mannons

But, Orin says, Lavinia will not do so if she knows what he is writing—the history of the Mannons, a true history of all the family crimes, beginning with Abe's, all the crimes, including theirs. He has tried to trace to its secret hiding place in the Mannon past the evil destiny behind their lives. He has written mostly about Lavinia because he has found her to be the most interesting criminal of all the Mannons—he has found in her many strange hidden things out of the Mannon past combine in her. He points out that she wanted the first mate Wilkins, on their voyage to Frisco because he reminded her of Adam (both of them were 'ship's

officer'). And that is why she discarded her mourning dress and bought new clothes—in Christine's colours. He considers that behind all her pretence about Christine's death being an act of justice was her jealous hatred because she herself wanted Adam for herself. When she says that she hated Adam, he says that she did so only when she came to know that Adam loved Christine. Then he accuses her of falling in love with a native named Avahanni. Her explanation is that she had kissed the native good night in gratitude ; she further adds that he being innocent and good, made her feel for the first time in her life that everything about could be sweet and natural. And she bluntly says : "I'm not your property. I've a right to love." Orin gets infuriated ; he grabs her by the throat and cries ? "You—you whore ! I'll kill you !" Then suddenly he breaks down and becomes weak and pitiful. He says in a tone of diffidence : "No ! You're lying about him, Aren't you ? For God's sake, tell me you're lying, Vinnie !" She accepts that she told him a lie about Avahanni, against her will for something rose up in her like an evil spirit. Orin then says that he never suspected her otherwise he would have killed her. He warns her that he cannot stand her leaving him for Peter and tells her that he is going to put this confession he has written in safe hands to be read in case she tries to marry Peter. She frantically grabs his arm and shakes him fiercely and says : "Stop having such thoughts ! Stop making me have them. You're like a devil torturing me ! I won't listen !" She breaks down and sobs brokenly. Orin stares at her dazedly ; he seems half to come back to his natural self and the wild look fades from his eyes leaving them glazed and lifeless. He forbids her to cry and asks her to leave him alone so that he may finish his work. Lavinia goes out and closes the door behind her. Orin unlocks the table drawer, pulls out his manuscript, and takes up his pen.

ACT III

Lavinia Loves Orin

No time has elapsed since the preceding act. Lavinia enters the sitting room. She is in a terrific state of tension. She begins to pace up and down, muttering her thoughts aloud : "I can't bear it ! Why does he keep putting his death in my head ? He would be better off if—Why hasn't he the courage—?" Her eyes seem to be unconsciously seeking the Mannon portraits on the wall as if they were the visible symbol of her God. Then she mutters bewilderingly, "Oh, God, don't let me have such thoughts. You know I love Orin ! Show me the way to save him. Don't let me think of death ! I couldn't bear another death !"

Something Awfully Wrong

A few moments later Hazel and Peter come. Peter looks hearty and good-natured but Hazel's face wears a nervous, uneasy

look. Hazel says that she hates the Mannon house, although she has to come here to see Orin whom Lavinia has shut up here. However, Peter says that Orin himself does not want to go with Hazel though Lavinia has always been forcing him to. Hazel feels there is something awfully wrong—somehow. Orin scares her at times, she says. She has come with a proposal of taking Orin to her home for which she has sought the permission of her mother. Peter also agrees to her proposal for he thinks that as long as Lavinia is tied down to Orin they (Peter and Lavinia) cannot be married. In the meantime Orin comes. Peter goes to attend the meeting of the Council. Orin gives Hazel a sealed envelope and warns her not to let Lavinia know about it and not to open it unless something happens to him or Lavinia tries to marry Peter. In the latter case, he says that Hazel should make Peter read the contents of the envelope the day before the wedding. At this moment he expresses his hatred against his sister : he says that she has got to be punished, she cannot have happiness. About his relations with Hazel he says that she must not love him any more. The only love he can know now, he says, is the love of guilt which breeds more guilt until one gets so deep at the bottom of hell there is no lower you can sink and one rests in peace. Hazel tells him that Lavinia has told her the whole episode of Orin's quarrel with his mother before she committed suicide and Orin's brooding over it and finally blaming himself for her death. And when Orin comes to know that Hazel knows everything, he requests her to take her away from here for he fears that something terrible may happen to him here.

Hazel's Invitation

Hazel, who has come here with a plan to take Orin to her house, invites him to come over the next day and stay with her family. But he worriedly says that Lavinia won't spare him for a moment. He feels so much dominated by her that he plans to sneak out when Lavinia is not looking at him and then Hazel can hide him and when Lavinia comes for him Hazel should tell her he wasn't there. Hearing a noise from the hall Orin senses that Lavinia is coming and so he tiptoes away as if he were afraid of being found close to Hazel and sits on the sofa adopting a suspiciously careless attitude. Lavinia appears in the doorway and gives a start as she sees that Hazel and Orin are alone. She quickly senses something in the atmosphere and glances sharply from one to the other as she comes into the room. She says to Orin and Hazel that they are looking mysterious and are hiding something from her. Peter denies all this and tells her that he is going to the Niles where he will stay for a while. But Lavinia can't let him go, though Orin insists on his going. Lavinia not only disallows Orin to leave her but she chides Hazel for meddling with their relations and domestic affairs. Hazel starts to go and tries to keep the envelope hidden. She says to Orin that she will wait for him next day ; to Lavinia she says that because

she has insulted her, there is no question of any friendship between them. Lavinia suddenly gets between her and the door and asks Hazel what she is hiding behind her back. Hazel does not reply to her question. Lavinia then turns to Orin and wants to know whether he has given Hazel what he has written. Orin indirectly says that he has. This infuriates Lavinia who calls him traitor and coward and commandingly asks Hazel to return the envelope to her which she does not. Then she seeks the mediation of Orin in this matter but he also disappoints her. Then in a mood of desperation she says. "Make Hazel give that up and I'll do anything—anything you want me to !"

Orin Accedes to Lavinia's Request

Orin accedes to her request. Hazel, who has not been able to understand what they talked about, and speaks to Orin in a tone of disappointment, "I suppose—we can't expect you tomorrow—now." Orin says, "No. Forget me. The Orin you loved was killed in the war." He further says with a twisted smile, "Remember only that dead hero and not his rotting ghost !" He tells her to go and she begins to sob and hurries blindly from the room. He comes back to Lavinia and puts the envelope in her hand and tells her that her promise means that she must give up Peter and never see him again. Lavinia says yes. Then he bares the agony of his heart and says that he loves her now with all the guilt in him—the guilt they share ; perhaps he loves her too much, he says. He further says : "There are times now when you don't seem to be my sister, nor Mother, but some stranger with the same beautiful hair—." He touches her hair caressingly. She pulls violently away. He laughs wildly and continues, "Perhaps you're Marie Brantome, eh ? And you say there are no ghosts in this house ?" She stares at him with fascinated horror and calls him insane. Orin confidently says that she would never dare to leave him and would feel guilty as he does, she would be damned like him. He again harps on the need of their confession and atonement for their crime. But Lavinia does not feel that they have committed any crime and says that whatever has happened is only justice. Orin turns and addresses the portraits on the wall with a crazy mockery, "You hear her ? You'll find Lavinia Mannon harder to break than me ! You'll have to haunt and hound her for a lifetime !" Lavinia's control snaps ; she turns on him now in a burst of frantic hatred and rage, "I hate you. I wish you were dead ! You're too vile to live ! You'd kill yourself if you weren't a coward !"

Death : An Island of Peace

Orin stares at her and bursts out with harsh mockery, "Another act of justice, eh ?" You want to drive me to suicide as I drove Mother. An eye for an eye, is that it ?" He stops abruptly

and stares before him, as if this idea were suddenly taking hold of his tortured imagination and speaks fascinatedly to himself : "Yes! That would be justice – now you are Mother ! She is speaking now through you !...Yes. It's the way to peace—to find her again—my lost Island—Death is an Island of Peace, too—Mother will be waiting for me there—...Mother ! Do you know what I'll do then ? I'll get on my knees and ask your forgiveness—and say...I'm glad you found love, Mother ! I'll wish you happiness—you and Adam ! ...You've heard me. You're here in the house now. You're calling me. You're waiting to take me home. After a few minutes Peter comes and Orin goes to the study saying that he is going to clean his pistol. Lavinia expresses to Peter her craving for his love, for the natural and spontaneous love that makes life happy and says that she can wait no more. In the meantime there is a muffled shot from the study across the hall—Orin has shot himself ! Lavinia sags weakly and supports herself against the table and utters in a faint trembling voice, "Orin ! Forgive me !" She mechanically hides the sealed envelope in a drawer of the table and locks the drawer. She says that she has to go in the study. When she turns to go her eyes catch the eyes of the Mannons in the portraits, "Why do you look at me like that ? Wasn't it the only way to keep your secret, too ? But I'm through with you forever now, do you hear ? I'm Mother's daughter – not one of you ! I'll live in spite of you !" She squares her shoulders, with a return of the abrupt military movement copied from her father—as if by the very act of disowning the Mannons she had returned to the fold—and marches stiffly from the room.

ACT IV

Orin's Funeral

The scene opens three days later, on the day of Orin's funeral. Lavinia has got every room in the house decorated with flowers for welcoming Peter—she wants everything to be pretty and cheerful, though she admits to Seth that there is no rest in this house which her grandfather built as "a Temple of Hate and Death". She has now decided to marry Peter and go away with him and forget this house and all that ever happened in it.

Lavinia's Wait For Dead to Die

While she is waiting for Peter, Hazel comes and tells her that it is a lie that Orin killed himself by accident and hammers the point that Lavinia drove him to commit suicide. She will not allow Lavinia to marry Peter at any cost, she says, because he will not be happy with her, that she will only drag him into something terrible, that he would feel tortured as Hazel is feeling, if he marries

Lavinia and lives alone with her. Nor could Lavinia be happy because the terrible thing would come between them. Hazel tells Lavinia that Peter fought with his mother the previous night when she tried to talk to him, though he has never behaved with his mother in this fashion. It is all because, she says, Lavinia has changed her. These words of Hazel make Lavinia angry. She threatens Hazel to kill her with Orin's pistol if she does not leave her alone. However, Hazel says that she still believes that Lavinia won't be dead to all honour and justice and requests her to let Peter read what Orin had in the envelope. She tells her that she already told Peter about it. In reaction, Lavinia utters : "Why can't the dead die !" Hazel seems to be considerate to Lavinia. "I know you're suffering, Vinnie", she says, "and I know your conscience will make you do what's right--and God will forgive you." She goes away and Peter comes. He looks haggard and tormented. He finds Lavinia terribly worn out. He consoles her and promises to marry her soon and take her away from this damned house because he is beginning to feel superstitious about it. Lavinia also agrees with him. "Love can't live in it", she says, "We'll go away and leave it alone to die—and I'll forget the dead." Lavinia tells him what Hazel has told her about his fight with his mother, and Hazel's insistence that Lavinia should not marry Peter. Peter tells her that his mother and Hazel have got a lot of crazy notions against her which, he assures Lavinia, they will get over when he marries her. And if they do not he will be "through with them".

Peter : Suspicious of Life

Lavinia expresses her feeling that Peter is suffering from some ailment ; his eyes which have been so trustful of late look suspicious of life now. She fears she has done this already to Peter and therefore asks him whether he is beginning to suspect her or he is wondering what it was Orin wrote. He says no to all this and adds that he could not pay attention to Orin's words because he knew the latter was out of his mind. Being reassured of Peter's love and faith in her she tries to consolidate her hold on him : "And you'll never let anyone come between us ? Nothing can keep us from being happy, can it ? You won't let anything, will you ?" And Peter says he won't. And then she proposes to him that they should get married now, this evening, for she is afraid to wait. Peter hesitates to accept her proposal because it does not look "right" to marry on the day of Orin's funeral. And he grows supicious in spite of himself and wants to know why she is afraid of waiting. He asks her if there was anything in what Orin wrote that would stop them from marrying. Lavinia's awareness of her psychic injury becomes acute ; with a wild laugh, she says : "The dead coming between ! They always would, Peter ! You trust me with your happiness ! But that means trusting the Mannon dead—and

they're not to be trusted with love! I know them too well! And I couldn't bear to watch your eyes grow bitter and hidden from me and wounded in their trust of life! I love you too much!" Peter grows more uneasy and suspicious—he says she makes him think there was something mysterious in the envelope. Lavinia desperately says that there was nothing so as he suspects and then throws her arms around him and says, "No! Don't think of that—not yet! I want a little while of happiness—in spite of all the dead! I've earned it! I've done enough—!" She grows more desperate and pleads wildly: "Why must we wait for marriage? I want a moment of joy—of love—to make up for what's coming! I want it now! Can't you be strong, Peter? Can't you be simple and pure? Can't you forget sin and see that all love is beautiful?" She kisses him with desperate passion and continues: "Kiss me! Hold me close! Want me! Want me so much you'd murder anyone to have me. I did that—for you! Take me in this house of the dead and love me! Our love will drive the dead away! It will shame them back into death." At the topmost pitch of desperate, frantic abandonment, she says, "Want me! Take me, Adam!"

The Dead Come Between Them

Lavinia is brought back to herself with a start by this name escaping her; then she laughs idiotically and utters in a tone of bewilderment: "Adam? Why did I call you Adam? I never even heard that name before—outside of the Bible!" And then she suddenly starts with a hopeless and dead finality, "Always the dead between! It's no good trying any more!" Peter thinks that Lavinia has gone crazy and that she is not like that she is talking about her. But Lavinia says in a dead voice, "I can't marry you, Peter. You mustn't see me again...Go home. Make it up with your mother and Hazel. Marry someone else. Love isn't permitted to me. The dead are too strong!" Peter's mind is in turmoil; he is unable to know what has changed Lavinia so much. Is it something what Orin wrote about that has made her so? As she does not answer, he grows more suspicious; now he puts direct questions: "He acted so queer about—what happened to you on the Islands. Was it something there—something to do with that native—? Her first instinctive reaction is that of hurt insult but she suddenly seizes on this as a way out and speaks with calculated coarseness: "All right! Yes, if you must know! I won't lie any more! Orin suspected I'd lusted with him! And I had!" Peter does not believe what she says. But Lavinia is bent upon degrading herself in his eyes by maintaining her false statement about her character, "Why shouldn't I? I wanted him! I wanted to learn love from him—love that wasn't a sin! And I did, I tell you! He had me! I was his fancy woman!" Lavinia thus succeeds in antagonizing Peter against her; he begins to think that his mother and Hazel rightly said that Lavinia was bad at heart; no matter Orin killed himself, he says, he hopes Lavinia will be punished. He hurries blindly off

and Lavinia watches him go ; then with a desperate cry she starts after him "Peter ! It's a lie ! I didn't—!" But it is too late—Peter is gone.

Lavinia's Self-Punishment

Seth enters and starts singing his melancholy "Shenandoah". Lavinia, without looking at him, picks up the words of the chanty and then speaks with a grim smile : "I'm not bound away—not now, Seth. I'm bound here—to the Mannon dead !" She turns as if to enter the house and Seth forbids her to do so but she speaks grimly : "Don't be afraid. I'm not going the way Mother and Orin went. That's escaping punishment. And there's no one left to punish me. I'm the last Mannon. I've got to punish myself ! Living alone here with the dead is a worse act of justice than death or prison ! I'll never go out or see anyone ! I'll have the shutters nailed closed so no sunlight can ever get in. I'll live alone with the dead, and keep their secrets, and let them hound me, until the curse is paid out and the last Mannon is let die...I know they will see to it I live for a long time ! It takes the Mannon to punish themselves for being born !" She orders Seth to close the shutters and nail them tight and to tell Hannah to throw out all the flowers. Seth goes past her up the steps and into the house. She ascends to the portico—and then turns and stands for a while, stiff and square-shouldered, staring into the sunlight with frozen eyes. Seth leans out of the window at the right of the door and pulls the shutters closed with a decisive bang. As if this were a word of command, Lavinia pivots sharply on her heel and marches woodenly into the house, closing the door behind her.

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Critical Commentary on Mourning Becomes Electra

(1) HÓMECOMING

ACT I

Central Theme Introduced

This is the exposition scene in the sense that the central theme of love and hate is introduced here. Christine loves Adam Brant, Lavinia loves Peter Niles, and Orin loves Hazel Niles. But the incestuous relations between Christine and Adam disgust Lavinia so much that she begins to hate love and decides not to marry the man she loves. It also introduces the conflict between paganism and puritanism which has been symbolized by the contrast between white and grey colours. The love between Marie Brantome and David is pure pagan love of heart whereas behind the veneer of puritanism the Mannons have incestuous relations. Further, the ironical undertone of the title of the section is made explicit in this section : what a unique *homecoming* Ezra Mannon will have after his return from the front—he has dreamt of pleasure of married life and spiritual peace at home but he will get death instead at the hand of his wife.

ACT II

The Two Complexes

The theme of Oedipus and Electra complexes is developed in this scene. Christine says to Lavinia that she has always felt that Orin was only her child whereas Lavinia was born of her father only. She also tells her daughter that the latter has always tried to steal her place. Further, Christine tells Adam that she fell in love with him because his face reminded her of Orin's.

ACT III

Free Love Versus Puritanism

We get the details of the natural love of Marie Brantome for David in this scene. Her physical features suggest her love full of the real spirit of life : she was always laughing and singing—frisky and full of life—with something free and wild about her like an animal. She was pretty too. The real character of a puritan in Ezra Mannon is reflected in his relations with Christine. Behind Christine's ironical observation on Lavinia's looking at the beauty of nature and nourishing a feeling of love for Peter lies the germ of puritan disapproval of the enjoyment of the beauty of nature and the blessing of love. She says : a puritan maiden like her should not "peer too inquisitively into Spring" because for her beauty is abomination and love a vile thing. Ezra Mannon's words to Lavinia are highly ironical : "All victory ends in the defeat of death. But does defeat end in the victory of death ?" His description of the condition of Orin after he got injury in his head again reinforces the concept of Oedipus complex ; he says that Orin acted as if he were a boy and always remembered his mother. His explanation of how he turned to Lavinia when he found Christine to be indifferent towards him, suggests the concept of Electra complex. And his turning to diverse professions thereafter implies Freudian concept of sublimation of sex. His experience of the horror of war signifies the evils of war, howsoever we may glorify it : when he was face to face with death in the war he realized that love and other values of life did not mean anything there and strangely enough, it all freed him to think of life ; before that life had only made him think of death. O'Neill gets an opportunity to dig at the root of puritanism by referring to the Mannon way of life. Preoccupation with death, he says, has been a Mannon way of thinking. Life was dying ; being born was starting to die ; death was being born.

ACT IV

Artistic Dramatization of Ezra's Premonition

Ezra's premonition of his death has been very artistically dramatized in this scene. Ezra is craving for a single touch of the affectionate finger of his wife who slinks away from her bed thinking that he is asleep. He calls her back and starts talking to her and tells her that he is feeling strange. She thinks of executing her plan of poisoning Ezra ; so she asks whether he is suffering from his heart trouble. Then he says, "Is that you are waiting for ?" He tells her that it is some sort of uneasiness that is troubling his mind—as if something in him was listening, watching, waiting for something to happen. Nothing seems to belong to him—neither the house nor

the room nor the bed ; they seem to be empty-waiting for someone to move in ; he also feels that Christine is waiting for something—for death to set her free. And we know what she is really waiting for—she is waiting for the death of her husband and for the arrival of Adam thereafter so that she would marry him.

(2) THE HUNTED

ACT I

Townsfolk as Chorus

The types of townsfolk whom O'Neill calls "a chorus representing the town as a human background for the drama of the Mannons", have been very dexterously used for developing the plot of the play. These minor characters acquaint us with the reactions of Christine and Lavinia to the death of Ezra. Mrs. Borden says that Christine is broken down over her husband's death and looks terrible while Lavinia is cold and calm like an icicle. Blake and Hills point out the greatness of Ezra as one of the Mannons but Mrs. Hills breaks in tactlessly : "You remember, Everett, you've always said about the Mannons that pride goeth before a fall and that some day God would humble them in their sinful pride." Blake says that he has a strong suspicion that it was love that killed Ezra.

Horrifying Images of War

Orin's horrifying image of war and his experience of working as a soldier under the command of Brigadier-General Ezra Mannon are heart-rending. When he comes home, he is visited by the memory of his dream of coming home. Before his arrival here he thought that the dream would never end and he and other armymen would go on murdering and being murdered until no one was left alive. He is glad that he has come home, though he still thinks that he is dreaming of coming home. His own house looks to him to be strange, ghostly and dead. He cannot believe that his father is dead ; he recalls to Lavinia his experience of war under the command of his father : "I hardened myself to expect my own death and everyone else's, and think nothing of it. I had to—to keep alive. It was part of my training as a soldier under him." But this does not mean that he is unfeeling, as Lavinia says. His mind is still full of ghosts ; he cannot grasp anything but war, in which his father was so alive. He was the war to him—the war that would never end until Orin died. He cannot understand peace—his father's end.

ACT II

Theme of Oedipus Complex

The theme of Oedipus complex is further developed in this scene. Though Orin's mind is still preoccupied with the memory of his dead father, he is happy that he is back home because he will now live with his mother. He is a typical example of mother-fixation in the works of O'Neill. He says to his mother : "You come before everything." He finds her as more beautiful that she has ever been. He complains to her that she has not replied to his letters and asks why she is so anxious to marry him off to Hazel and get rid of him. His idyllic description of the imagined South Sea Islands smacks of his fascination for his mother : he says to Christine that when he was out of his head he felt he was really on the Islands where there was no one except him and his mother ; the breaking of the waves was her voice to him ; the sky was the same colour as her eyes ; the warm sand was like her skin ; in short, the whole Island was she. He promises that he will never leave her nor will he ever marry any other girl because Christine is his "only girl". Christine says that she still considers him to be her "boy".

ACT III

War is Suicidal

How war is suicidal is illustrated in this scene through the abnormal behaviour of Orin. "I had a queer feeling", says Orin, "that war meant murdering the same man over and over, and that in the end I would discover the man was myself. Their faces keep coming back in dreams—and they change to Father's face—or mine—." He is, however, unable to understand the meaning of all this. The war is over, he says, but the war inside them who killed has not ended.

Son-Father-Antagonism

Freudian concept of son-father-antagonism is another theme that is elaborated in this scene. He stares at the face of his dead father and addresses it with a strange friendly mockery : "Who are you ? Another corpse ! You and I have been fields and hillsides sown with them—and they mean nothing !—nothing but a dirty joke life plays upon life !" He smiles drily and says : "Death sits so naturally on you. Death becomes the Mannons. You were always like a statue of an eminent dead man—sitting on a chair in a park or straddling a horse in a town square—looking over the head of life without a sign of recognition—cutting it dead for the impropriety of living." He chuckles to himself with a queer affectionate amusement : "You never cared to know me in life—but I think we

might be friends now you are dead !" Orin's wish to befriend his father after the death of the latter is his desire to take his place.

ACT IV

Mother-Fixation

Orin's mother-fixation takes a violent turn when he sees his mother in the arms of Adam, his father-image. He is shocked to hear her requesting Adam to kiss her ; he is stunned to hear her warn Adam against her own son ; he is bewildered to hear that they are planning to go to *his* Island—which was *she* and *he*. So he kills his rival for the love of his mother. He looks at the face of Adam which looks like Ezra's—which is another example of Adam's being Orin's father image. He feels that Adam looks like him, too, and says, "Maybe, I have committed suicide !" This also supports the above thesis : he has killed the lover of his mother which he is.

ACT V

Theme of Incest

The themes of Oedipus complex and brother-sister-incest run concurrently in this scene. Orin tells Christine that he has killed Adam and admonishes her for grieving for a "servant's bastard". He feels that she is still under Adam's influence and therefore he castigates her and sermonises to forget the dead Captain. He promises to make her happy with his love when he will take her to the South Sea Islands. Christine does not show any sign of having heard him. He shakes her desperately and says : "Why won't you speak to me ? Will you always love him ? Do you hate me now ?......Mother ! Answer me ! Say you forgive me !"

Lavinia cannot allow Orin to fall a prey to Oedipus complex. When she sees that Orin is going closer to Christine, she reprimands him with bitter scorn : "After all that's happened are you becoming her crybaby again .....Leave her alone. Go in the house." As he hesitates, she commands more sharply, "Do you hear me ? March !" And when Christine commits suicide and Orin is bewilderingly lamenting her loss, Lavinia speaks to him soothingly, "You have me, haven't you ? I love you. I'll help you to forget."

(3) THE HAUNTED

ACT I : SCENE I

Psychology of Guilt

The psychology of guilty conscience, which is the major theme of the whole section called *The Haunted*, has been dramatized here. The townspeople tell us that the Mannon house is haunted by the ghosts of Ezra and Christine. But so far as the action in the play itself is concerned, we see that Orin is the worst sufferer of his guilty conscience. He walks slowly towards the house as if he were hesitating to go in ; he is dreadfully thin ; his haggard swarthy face is set in a blank lifeless expression and he walks like an automaton. And when he reaches the spot where his mother had sat moaning, the last time he had seen her alive, he stammers, "It was here—she—the last time I saw her alive—!"

Lavinia's Conversion

So while Orin is still under the influence of Oedipus complex, Lavinia is moving ahead in her bed to possess him. Her body is filled out ; her movements have lost square-shouldered stiffness ; she now bears a striking resemblance to her mother in every respect, even to being dressed in the green her mother had affected. She calls Orin in the tone one would use to a child. Seeing Orin moving like an automaton, she encourages him in a motherly tone to be brave and capable of facing every situation.

ACT I : SCENE II

Orin's Love For Lavinia

Orin also now falls a victim to Lavinia's possessiveness ; in the beginning he is disgusted with the idea that Lavinia is trying to steal his mother's place in his life but later on shows his displeasure at Lavinia's enjoyment of the joy and gaiety on the Islands. He remarks that the Islands which he imagined to be his and Lavinia's as well proved to be hers only ; they only made him sick and the naked women disgusted him ; he thinks that Lavinia not only enjoyed the company of the natives but she fell in love with one of them and lusted with him. This shows his unconscious desire to have sex-relation with Lavinia That is why when he is awfully assailed by the memory of his dead mother and finds none to replace her, he turns to Lavinia and says, "Vinnie, You're all I have in the world ! "

Puritanism Versus Paganism

The conflict between puritanism and paganism is apparent here. The spontaneity of the natural impulses and instincts of the natives make Orin sick and disgust him but Lavinia has all admiration for them. She says to Peter about her experience on the Islands : "I loved those Islands. They finished setting me free. There was something mysterious and beautiful—a good spirit—of love—coming out of the land and the sea. It made me forget death. There was no hereafter. There was only this world—the warm earth in the moonlight—the trade wind in the coco palms—the surf on the reef—the fires at night and the drum throbbing in my heart—the natives dancing naked and innocent—without knowledge of sin."

ACT II

Orin's Guilty Conscience

Orin's guilty conscience tortures him awfully. He is every moment obsessed with the idea of confessing his guilt and wishes that Lavinia should also do so. He has withdrawn himself from the outer world of light and has locked himself in the dark study of his father which has the light of man-made device and not natural light of God. To quote his own words, "I find artificial light more appropriate for my work—man's light, not God's—man's feeble striving to understand himself, to exist for himself, in the darkness! It's a symbol of his life—a lamp burning out in a room of waiting shadows." He cannot love Hazel because when he sees in her eyes love for a murderer he feels like confessing his guilt.

But he will not spare Lavinia either. He says that if he had known that Lavinia loved Avahanni, he would have killed her. Further, he warns her that she should never try to leave him and marry Peter. Moreover, his disease infects her also—she feels that he has become her guilty conscience, too.

ACT III

Perverted Puritanism

Orin can neither love nor would allow Lavinia to love. That is, as a typical Mannon symbolical of puritanism, he is totally perverted. He thinks of confessing his crime but he does not confess ; he is desirous of keeping Lavinia with him and so he does

not approve of her decision to marry Peter, but he himself does not marry Hazel who would share his grief. It is all due to the perversion of his whole personality that he is so callous towards his own sister. He makes such an arrangement that even if he is not alive and Lavinia tries to marry Peter, she cannot fulfil her desire because it appears from his talk to Hazel that he has written in his confession that Lavinia lusted with Avahanni. Moreover, he says to Hazel that Lavinia should not be allowed to be happy and that she must be punished. But the antagonism between puritanism and paganism takes a wild turn when Lavinia turns on him in a burst of frantic hatred and rage : "I hate you. I wish you were dead ! You're too vile to live ! You'd kill yourself if you weren't a coward !" Yes, the puritan in him is too vile to live and he is not a coward. That is why he kills himself.

ACT IV

Exploration of Lavinia's Psyche

Lavinia's slip of the tongue is the most remarkable achievement of O'Neill in exploring the psyche of the heroine of the play. When Peter arrives she is torn between her feeling that she should leave him alone and her desire to escape with him, at least for some time, from the Mannon dead. Her hysterical flow of words expresses her inner tension and her attempt to cling to the sound and healthy Peter at any cost ; this constitutes her more or less conscious attitude. But as her senses are stirred she begins to identify Peter with Adam Brant, she kisses him with desperate passion and says "Kiss me ! Hold me close ! Want me ! Want me so much you'd murder anyone to have me. I did that—for you ! Take me in this house of the dead and love me ! Our love will drive the dead away ! It will shame them back into death." The passage is deeply ironical. While expressing the belief that she and Peter will be able to lay the dead to rest, Lavinia revives them by demanding the same from him that Christine and Adam demanded from one another ; the conscious attempt is thwarted by an upsurge of unconscious desires. As though by natural association, the reference to the dead is followed by the fatal slip. At the topmost pitch of desperate, frantic abandonment, Lavinia says : "Want me ! Take me, Adam !" She is brought back to herself with a start by this name escaping her. Then bewilderedly and laughing idiotically, she says : "Adam ? Why did I call you Adam ? I never even heard that name before—outside the Bible !" Then she utters with a hopeless dead finality : "Always the dead between ! It is no good trying any more !"

Lavinia as a Symbol

O'Neill seems to have taken a bold step in characterizing Lavinia as different from all the Mannons. Perhaps he has used her as a powerful symbol of modern man who finds no solution of existential problems in death but who is rather condemned to wade through the unfathomable ocean of hellish life. When Seth forbids her to enter the house she says : "Don't be afraid. I'm not going the way Mother and Orin went. That's escaping punishment. And there's no one left to punish me. I'm the last Mannon. I've got to punish myself. Living alone here with the dead is a worse act of justice than death or prison. I'll never go out or see anyone ! I'll have the shutters nailed closed, so no sunlight can ever get in. I'll live alone with the dead, and keep their secrets, and let them hound me, until the curse is paid out and the last Mannon is let die."

21

Themes of Mourning Becomes Electra

The Inner Conflict

In *Mourning Becomes Electra,* O'Neill leaves for a while the war between God and science and returns to the more limited conflict within the "suffering" individual. But the conflict and the suffering are traceable more specifically than ever to the fixations upon father and mother, to the tension between puritanism and freedom, pride and love, death and life. As before, in most of the plays since *Desire Under the Elms* all other masks and values stem from the power of the father-and-mother-images, the Oedipus and Electra complexes. In his detailed "Working Notes and Extracts from a Fragmentary Work Diary", O'Neill outlines his purpose and method in *Mourning Becomes Electra,* emphasizing repeatedly his equation of the complexes with destiny. They are "a modern tragic interpretation of classic fate without benefit of Gods—for it (the play) must ; before everything, remain (a) modern psychological play—fate springing out of the family."

Working out of the Family Fate

As with the original Atreidae, the family fate of the New England Mannons is ancestral, not limited to one generation. It has been set in motion before the opening of the play by Abe Mannon, father of Ezra (Agamemnon) and grandfather of Lavinia and Orin (Electra and Orestes). Abe's younger brother, David, had been involved in a liaison with a French-Canadian governess, Marie Brantome, resulting in her pregnancy. David married her, but Abe (in Lavinia's words) put them both out of the house and then afterwards tore it down and built this one because he wouldn't live where his brother had disgraced the family. The child of David and Marie is Adam Brant, the Aegisthus of the play, who returns to avenge his parents' death in poverty and misery after their exile.

Pride as a Source of Death

The house of Mannon, therefore, was built upon outraged pride and puritanism, leading inevitably to death for the Mannon line. For them pride is the source of death, and love is the source of life. Existence for the Mannons is life-in-death from which love, represented by Marie Brantome, has been shut out. In their longing to escape the ugly reality of their actual lives the Mannons yearn for release in love untainted by pride and sin, and in death itself. Christine's acceptance of sexuality, has been embittered by Ezra's puritanism—distorted into a possessive passion ; but to her husband, lover, and children, she still represents release and sinlessness. Even to Lavinia, who hates her because she "stole all love from me when I was born", Christine is still the longed-for mother, as well as the image of herself, Lavinia, as giver and lover.

Shift of Emphasis

Since O'Neill has shifted the emphasis of the trilogy from Orestes to Electra, the changes which take place in the character of Lavinia provide a new demension to the theme of the play. Caught like Nina Leeds in the father-complex, she struggles at once to realize and to escape from a self-image which is only a reflection of her soldier father. Her physical appearance tells the story : tall like her mother, her body is thin, flat-breasted and angular, and its unattractiveness is accentuated by her plain black dress. Her movements are stiff and she carries herself with a wooden, square-shouldered, military bearing. She has a flat dry voice and a habit of snapping out her words like an officer giving orders. But in spite of these dissimilarities one is immediately struck by her facial resemblance to her mother. This facial resemblance, the mask of the mother in Lavinia, will have its moment of fulfilment, but only briefly, until God the Father's lightning strikes again.

Pride, Puritanism and Vindictive Justice

The father, Ezra, embodies the characteristics of the family which constitute their fate – pride, puritanism, and a strong sense of vindictive justice. Because of his ingrown egotism and his guilty attitude towards sex, Ezra does not, at the beginning of the play, know how to love. Desire for his wife takes the form of brutal and clumsy lust. Not until he has known the comradeship of other men on the battlefield and has seen death, does he become aware of the significance of love and life : "Death made me think of life. Before that life had only made me think of death...... That's always been the Mannons' way of thinking. They went to the white meeting-house on Sabbaths and meditated on death. Life was a dying. Being born was starting to die"

Death was being born." Ironically, his ability to love and his insight into life come to Ezra only when he returns home to Christine's hatred and his own death.

Suicidal Frustrations

Christine has fallen in love with Adam Brant, the son of Marie Brantome. When Ezra is in the throes of a heart attack, Christine deliberately withholds his medicine. To the outside world, Ezra appears to have died from natural causes ; Lavinia however, discovers her mother's guilt. She plans her vengeance—driven not only by the Mannon sense of justice and her love for her father, but by her frustrated love for Adam and hatred and jealousy of her mother. Since Christine has "stolen" the love of both men from Lavinia, the fitting relation for Lavinia is not to take her mother's life, but to take from her the love which is her life. At Lavinia's instigation, Orin murders Adam Brant. Christine takes her own life, and after Christine's suicide the spirit of vindictiveness and death in the Mannons seems to be temporarily satisfied, and Lavinia can come to life. She takes on all the attributes of her mother : "She seems a mature woman, sure of her feminine attractiveness. Her brown-gold hair is arranged as her mother's had been...The movements of her body now have the feminine grace her mother had possessed." Now, at perhaps her guiltiest, she has lost her sense of sin and death. Her father's ghost in Lavinia has now been placated ; like him, she could find life only after experience of death.

Chained to Mannons

And as Lavinia assumes the characteristics of the mother, Orin takes on those of his father. He even wears a beard and walks like a "tin soldier". Together they take a trip to the East, stopping at the South Sea Islands. Orin watches Lavinia's new sexuality with puritanical disapproval and jealousy. He feels that he and Lavinia have actually *become* their father and mother ; "Can't you see I'm now in Father's place and you're mother ?...I'm the Mannon you're chained to !"

Symbolic Incest Pattern

To complete the symbolic incest pattern representing the lonely Mannons' introversion and their narcissistic inability to love any but another Mannon, Orin falls in love with his sister. The same duality of love and loathing for oneself and its reflection in another which has always dominated Mannon relationships now governs this one. Orin hates Lavinia as much as he desires her ; she has become to him what the Furies were to Orestes, a constant reminder

of guilt, driving him towards madness. He wants to become her lover in order to force her to share his guilt. "How else can I be sure you won't leave me? You would never dare to leave me—then! You would feel as guilty then as I do... .." Lavinia, both fascinated and repelled, shouts her hatred at him: "I hate you! You're too vile to live! You'd kill yourself if you weren't such a coward."

Crumbling of the Illusion

With these words Lavinia has committed her last murder. When Orin shoots himself Lavinia's last illusion of her own innocence begins to crumble. The puritan conscience (or superego or father-god), from which she has found release in identification with the mother, now reasserts itself. She shouts defiance at the portraits of her ancestors, "I'm Mother's daughter—not one of you...!" but even as she does so, the Mannon pride claims its own. The feminine Lavinia now "squares her shoulders, with a return of the abrupt military movement copied from her father which she had of old—as if by the very act of disowning the Mannons she had returned to the fold—and marches stiffly from the room."

Last Effort to Reach For Life

Lavinia takes one more desperate effort to reach from behind her mask of death toward life. She begs her childhood sweetheart, the innocent, untempted, and unsuspicious Peter, to marry her. Even as she pleads with him, however, she knows that the dead have not forgotten, and will not rest until justice has been performed. She must pay for their lives with her own, not in the easy expiation of actual death—that would be the release for which she has always longed—but in a return to the living death which is the Mannon fate, and which, as always, is to be accomplished by Mannon pride. She tells Peter goodbye, as Seth, the gardener, sings the refrain of his "Shenandoah".

The Trap of Self Claims Its Prey

When Lavinia "pivots sharply on her heel and marches woodenly into the house, closing the door behind her", the tension between love and pride, life and death, is dissolved; only pride and death remain. Violated order has been restored: the trap of self has finally and with finality claimed its inevitable prey.

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Mourning Becomes Electra: *Adaptation of the Oresteia*

O'Neill's Debt to Aeschylus

One of O'Neill's most interesting and most important experiments is his adaptation of the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus to an American situation. In the light of his search for form, it is understood that O'Neill should be attracted to Greek tragedy. After a century of puritanism, sentimentality and scientific attack, the Christian tradition that had served Renaissance drama so well was defunct. Greek tragedy dealt with the Mystery within a conventional structure; it came out of a relatively homogeneous culture and was well supplied with legendary themes. In short, the Greek playwrights had a form at hand; they needed only to shape their material to it. O'Neill set out to borrow both form and content from Aeschylus. In 1925 he noted in his work diary his intention to create a modern psychological drama based on Greek legend. This entry began a five-year progress toward the Broadway production of *Mourning Becomes Electra.*

Modification of Aeschylus' Plot

Because O'Neill followed the plot of the *Oresteia* so closely, his modifications of Aeschylus' plot stand out very clearly. He used the sequence of events point for point; he adopted character-types and relationships that the plot required. In borrowing these components from the Greek play, he perforce accepted the conventional ritual structure of conflict (agon), suffering (pathos), and revelation (epiphany) that influenced the Greek tragedian in the construction of his plot. What O'Neill could not adapt from the Greek play were the culturally determined attitudes that the *Oresteia* expressed, the view of history as a providential development from a code of private vengeance to a system of trial by jury. By changing the situation of

the drama from Athens to New England, O'Neill changed the cultural milieu and so had to find a comparable set of American cultural attitudes with which to motivate his personae. By looking at the Greek model and studying O'Neill's version, we can determine the contributions of American situation and motivation to the over-all meaning of *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

Cultural Background of the Oresteia

In his treatment of the legend of the House of Atreus, Aeschylus is drawing on the resources the culture offers him. The legend that provides the base for the trilogy is a traditional story that expresses the experience of the people on three levels : the individual, the societal, the transcendental. These levels are presented by the playwright as interpenetrating so that the history of the House becomes the history of the tribe and ultimately part of the history of the human race and its relationship with the gods. The action dramatizes the family curse that follows the Atreides like Fate, the effect of the code of blood-revenge on the city of Argos, and the gradual evolution of the institution of civilized justice. The legendary sources, the plot incidents and the structural elements all conspire toward the reconciliation of the individual with a reconstituted society under the guidance of divine providence.

Texture of the Oresteia

Aeschylus establishes the legendary backdrop of his drama by weaving the relevant details into the texture of the play. These details include a record of the crimes of the House of Atreus beginning with the struggle of the sons of Pelops, Atreus and Thyestes, over their father's throne and the seduction of Atreus' wife by Thyestes. Atreus drove his brother out of the country and brought him back only to feed him the flesh of his children at the infamous banquet. In this context, the conflict is not merely a personal feud—accompanied by deeds however blood-curdling—between two brothers ; its repercussions extend to the whole society and into the dimension of the gods. The family vendetta is an affair of state, a dynastic struggle. Moreover, the Thyestian banquet recalls an earlier banquet, child-eating, by the divine ancestors of the sons of Pelops. In order to protect his throne, Chronos swallowed up his children as soon as they were born. Though there is no description of child-eating by Chronos' son Zeus, the father of the gods, the "Dithyrambos" is reborn from Zeus' "male womb". The traditional significance of the cannibalistic banquet relates to all three levels of the action in the *Oresteia* : the legendary motive of personal revenge is linked to the dynastic fear of being superseded as King ; both these motifs recall the ritualistic entry of the young god Dionysus into Zeus' "male womb" in order to be reborn. This series of

associations situates the action in a broad perspective relevant to the audience, reaching back into their tribal legends and up into the dimension of the Olympian gods.

Motifs of the Oresteia

The main incidents of the plot dramatize these same motifs of blood-guilt, dynastic struggle and the persistent working of the curse through the generations of the House of Atreus. Clytemnestra's motive for murdering her husband, King Agamemnon, is twofold : to avenge the ritual murder of their child, slain by Agamemnon to obtain favourable winds for the Argive war-fleet, and to retain the regency of Argos for herself and her lover. Sexual intrigue and kinsman-murder are the continuing fruits of the Thyestian curse on the house of Atreus. Orestes, the third generation Atreides whose hands are yet unstained, faces the dilemma central to the action : he too must avenge a kinsman, his father, according to the tribal code. He can accomplish this only by violating the taboo against matricide and so perpetuating the curse. The cosmic powers of Earth and Sky are engaged in the action when Apollo, Zeus' messenger, orders Clytemnestra's death and, after Orestes carries out his command, the Furies—dark, maternal Earth-spirits—pursue him. Aeschylus solves this dilemma and reconciles the polarities inherent in the tribal code by abrogating it in favour of the juridical and social system of the *polis*. Orestes is brought to trial for his "crime" before the goddess Athena and a jury of Athenian elders. When the jury of citizens split their votes, Athena casts the deciding ballot for acquittal. The Furies are pacified by Athena's arguments and transformed into guardians of the city. This conclusion draws explicitly on Athenian history, and celebrates the intuition of democratic processes—symbolized by the Areopagus, the ancient court for the adjudication of murder cases. The common law of the community is no longer the tribal code that sets kinsman against kinsman, but trial by a jury of citizen peers. The cosmic antagonism between the patriarchial Olympians and the defenders of matriarchy is reconciled by the transformation of the Furies into the gentle Semae who bless the city from their caves on the Areopagus and lend their name to the oaths in the law courts. It is clear that Aeschylus is drawing here on materials that are part of his audience's cultural heritage.

Structural Pattern of the Oresteia

The structural pattern, too, which undergirds the action fulfils audience expectation, though perhaps a less precise and conscious one. The legendary plot fills out ritual categories with which the audience would be familiar : agon, pathos, and epiphany. In the *Oresteia* the agon can be reduced to the struggle between polarities in the tribal code : filial piety and blood-revenge. From this

springs the pathos, the suffering of generations of Atreides, culminating the dilemma which faces Orestes. The epiphany reveals the divine teleology that dissolves the old system and creates a new, more enlightened one. On the level of the ritualistic pattern, the hero's experience culminates in rebirth. He passes from guilt to suffering and then to purgation and emerges a new man. This pattern is an analogue of the rebirth of the god. The legend as dramatized, then, includes both the historical resolution of a cultural dilemma and the ritual pattern that gives this resolution a cosmic dimension.

Unity of Concept in the Oresteia

Even in this summary treatment of the trilogy its unity of concept and execution is evident. We see how this unity flows from the dramatist's ability to shape the cultural components with which he works. Aeschylus inherited the ritual structure, the legend of the House of Atreus, the tradition of Athenian democracy. That he was able to forge these elements into a dramatic unity is testimony to his artistry ; that the elements were available to him is testimony to the homogeneity of Greek culture. These components point to an organic complex of attitudes in the fifth-century Athenian mind which could view the development of civilization as a providential progress and the individual as a member of the community governed by divinely sanctified laws. Thus Orestes, caught in the web of circumstance, can be redeemed by the same forces that produced his guilt. In the concluding movement of the drama, the hero is purged of all guilt and "reborn", a new society is initiated and the cosmos is ordered on all levels.

O'Neill's Adoption of General Plan

Mourning Becomes Electra follows the general outlines of the Aeschylean trilogy very closely. The playwright borrows the three-play division, the sequence of events and the climactic order. In *Homecoming*, Ezra Mannon (Agamemnon) returns from war and is poisoned by his wife Christine (Clytemnestra) who is carrying on an affair with Adam Brant (Aegisthus). In the second play *The Hunted*, Orin (Orestes) and Lavinia (Electra) avenge their father's death by murdering Brant and driving Christine to suicide. *The Haunted* culminated with a judgment on Orin and Lavinia for their part in the destruction of their mother.

O'Neill's Conclusion Different

The point-for-point parallelism in the plots makes the divergence in the conclusions more striking. O'Neill and Aeschylus both include a "judgment" in the last play. But O'Neill's does not

open out into a social revolution and a theophany. He concludes with a self-judgment by the two remaining members of the House of Mannon. Lavinia immures herself in the sepulchral family mansion; she punishes herself with a living death. Orin is not vindicated and absolved of his mother's "murder"; he commits suicide. The difference between Aeschylus' ending and O'Neill's is all the more important because the American playwright borrows his structure from the Greek. The epiphany of the Oresteia vindicates on three levels those teleological processes by which suffering leads to a new life for the individual and the community. The epiphany of *Mourning Becomes Electra* depicts an isolation imposed by self-judgment that leads to death. Mourning becomes Electra; death becomes the Mannons.

Cultural Determinants

This epiphany, however, is not a simple, disconnected cry of despair; it proceeds from the cultural determinants with which O'Neill situates and motivates his action: the Puritan heritage and Freudian psychology. The cultural attitudes that are formulated under these headings are as definite and describable as the dictates of tribal custom in the *Oresteia.* Each supplies a set of motivations for the personae, and together they constitute an agon like the filial-piety and blood-revenge components in Aeschylus. They function in *Mourning Becomes Electra* to determine the direction of the action and the overall meaning of the play

Similarity of Plots

The plot of *Mourning Becomes Electra* is remarkably faithful to the *Oresteia.* Its characterization, symbolism and tone, however, are determined by O'Neill's interpretation of the puritan heritage, by Freudian psychology, and by the corollary motif of salvation by spatial remove. The effect of these non-Hellenic elements is a shift of focus so radical as to produce a complete inversion of the play's meaning. The *Oresteia* proclaims a constant relationship between the individual and society. Orestes' crime does not isolate him from the community—he flees to Delphi, the communal shrine; he is judged by a jury of citizens; his personal fate changes the structure of society from clan-centred to city-centred. Conversely, the Mannons become progressively more isolated from the community. The townsfolk attend the funeral in the second act, but in the third they shrink from entering the "haunted house". The familial society contracts until only Orin and Lavinia are left; finally Lavinia shuts out all society.

Code of Blood Vengeance

Secondly, in the *Oresteia* the Greek code of blood vengeance provides the motivation for Orestes' crime and defines the nature of, and sets limits to, his guilt. He must murder his mother to avenge his father. The dilemma is perfect. In O'Neill's play, on the other hand, the crimes are rooted in the characters' subconscious, and the feeling of guilt is unlimited because it proceeds from the Puritan sense of damnation. Finally, the solution to Orestes' dilemma in the *Oresteia* is rooted in the popular history of the Athenian nation. The establishment of the jury-trial system makes the conclusion inevitable because it actually happened. Because the historical event is presented as the result of a providential process, Orestes' purgation is complete; it is sanctioned by the gods. O'Neill's solution to the Mannon curse is not purgation, but death. Orin "returns to Mother" by committing suicide ; Lavinia's self-immurement is merely a surrogate for suicide. No Providence, benign or malicious, it invoked, and even the sense of inevitability is contingent on acceptance of O'Neill's Freudian coordinates.

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Attack on Puritanism in Mourning Becomes Electra

Suggestive Setting

Mourning Becomes Electra is a psychological dramatization of the evils of puritanism. The puritan heritage of the personae in the play is established in a way by the setting. O'Neill situates the action in New England. The locale—in literary convention at least—is rugged, cold, sea-bound. The thin-soiled, rock-strewn countryside with small, barren mountain-ranges and rivers running down to the gray Atlantic creates an atmosphere of severity, inflexity, firmness. The people are like the landscape—tight, thrifty, joyless, merchant-class puritans, descendants of Anglo-Saxon nonconformists. The Mannons live in this setting; their attitudes are defined by the locale.

O'Neill's Version of Puritanism

Within this general situation O'Neill specifies his puritanism. It is not a careful historical approximation of New England attitudes vintage 1865; it is puritanism as O'Neill understood it through the eyes of his own generation. And, in the early twentieth century, among the avant-garde of the literary world, it was the sum total of everything that was wrong with American society. No matter what the private views of individuals, the official American posture was a hypocritical, righteously irreligious (or a-religious) puritanism.

The Voice of Mencken

The puritan background of *Mourning Becomes Electra* comprises, along with broader classical elements, that complex of attitudes described and decried by Mencken and his associates. O'Neill weaves these attitudes into the background of his action. As the locale calls puritanism to mind, O'Neill visualizes the tradition in his stage setting. The Mannon house characterizes the family. The facade of the mansion is fronted by a white Grecian temple portico

with six tall columns and a gray stone wall behind. This portico is like an incongruous white mask fixed on the house to hide its sombre gray ugliness. If the audience fails to mark the significance of the setting, early in the first act it is called to their attention. In the words of Christine :

> Every time I come back after being away it (the house) appears more like a sepulchre ! The "whited" one of the Bible—pagan temple front stuck like a mask on Puritan gray ugliness ! It was just like old Abe Mannon to build such a monstrosity—as a temple for his hatred.

It is highly unlikely that a New Englander of 1865 would see the family home in this light ; the voice is the voice of Mencken. The action is played against this parisaical facade as the house of the Mannons visualizes for the audience the traditional attitudes of the "House of Mannon".

Cultural Base of the Mannon Heritage

This interpretation of the puritan heritage rests on a broad cultural base ; the Mannon background also includes those features characteristic of the nineteenth-century New Englander. Grandfather Abe, whose Biblical name has dynastic implications, established a shipping business that made the family fortune. (The name Mannon, with resonances of *Agamemnon*, also has an appropriate resemblance to "Mannon".) As a result of their dedication to business, the Mannons are the most prosperous family in the community. After learning law, he became judge and mayor of the town. Devotion to business is part of the traditional Protestant mystique. Diligence and industry lead to financial success—and this success carries with it a debt to society.

The Mannons as "The Elect"

To all outward appearances, the Mannons are "the elect". Their prominence in the community and the lavishness of the mansion testify to their probity, according to the orthodox standard. Christine, whose adulterous union would hardly be explicable in a rigid puritan, is set apart from the real Mannons ; her ancestry is not new England or even Anglo-Saxon. She is "furrin lookin' and queer, French and Dutch descended." Her family has not been financially successful—"She didn't bring no money when Ezra married her." "She ain't the Mannon kind" sums up the xenophobic reaction of the townspeople This background is contrasted with the family's—Anglo-Saxon stock, old settlers, successful merchants, in short, puritan "elect".

No Relish of Salvation

Though the family has all the visible earmarks of the predestined, these are simply outward show. Like the mansion, their puritanism is full of dead men's bones, and their theology has no relish of salvation in it. "The Mannon way" is a preoccupation with death, the cold remnant of Calvinistic dogma. For example, Ezra says, "Life had only made me think of death...That's always been the Mannon way of thinking. They went to the white meeting-house on Sabbaths and meditated on death. Life was a dying. Being born was starting to die. Death was being born... That white meeting-house. It stuck in my mind—clean scrubbed and white-washed—a temple of death." According to the cultural analyses of historians like Weber, the virtues of the puritan—industry, thrift, social responsibility, regular habits, careful avoidance of sensuality, all stemmed from a search for certainty about election. Somewhat oversimplifying Calvin's theology they depended on cautious organization and a clock-like regularity as protection against an irretreivable lapse—a fall whose implications extended out of time into the *illud tempus* of predestined election, that "moment" which melds the beginning with the end of time, the arche with the eschaton. No redemption is possible for the sinner within this system ; once fallen, he is forever reprobate. The Mannon concern with death, however, does not relate it to grace, election and after-life. There is no theological foundation to the puritan code in *Mourning Becomes Electra.* Like the puritanism that Mencken describes, it is an appearance without substance, an ethic without a dogma. These attitudes provide a basis for the motivation of the personae, but, unlike the tribal code of the *Oresteia*, they do not include an Olympian dimension.

Sex and Puritanism

Another prominent feature of the Mannons' puritanism is their attitude towards sex. For O'Neill's generation, puritanism was associated, first and foremost, with a repressive attitude towards sexual impulses. This appetite posed the greatest problem for the Calvinist ; it exercised the strongest pull and thus had to be most zealously guarded against. The "fall from grace" gradually assimilated sexual overtones ; the fallen woman fell only in one direction.

Sex and the Family Curse

O'Neill's characters are caught between this revulsion and fascination. The origin of the family curse is, in the first instance, Abe Mannon's hatred towards his brother David because of David's seduction of, and subsequent marriage to, Marie Brantome. He went

so far as to destroy the house in which the seduction took place. This hatred has implicit approval in the puritan way—no association of the elect with the reprobate. By sustaining the orthodox position on sexual errance, Grandfather Mannon—who, it turns out, was in love with Marie himself—bequeathed his righteous hatred to the family. In the play this strain in the Mannon ethos finds full expression in the reactions of Lavinia and Orin. In her first conversation with Captain Brant, Lavinia declares that she "hates love" and equates it with "naked women and sin". "Love" means the physical act of love ; the Captain, like all men, dreams dirty dreams—of love. Christine, whose descent explains her liberal attitude—the French are traditionally a passionate people—derides her daughter for prudishness : "Puritan maidens should not peer too inquisitively into spring ! Isn't beauty an abomination and love a vile thing ?" Love is sometimes vile also for Christine ; her own marriage soon turned "romance into disgust". She made her husband feel the burden of her distaste, and he expresses his reaction in good puritan style : "What are bodies to me ?...Ashes to ashes, dirt to dirt ! Is that your notion of love ? Do you think I married a body ?...You made me appear a lustful beast in my own eyes—as you've done since our first marriage night." For the Mannons, dirt and animality and abomination spell out the implications of sex.

The Fascination-Revulsion Syndrome

The obverse of the coin is depicted also ; their revulsion is attended by a fascination. Though bodies are only bodies, when Ezra sets out to effect a reconciliation with his wife, he becomes passionate. Christine allays his suspicion about her affair with Brant by kissing him and allowing him to press her "fiercely in his arms". Lavinia's repugnance for mother's sensuality is flavoured with jealousy, especially about her father's affection. Of all the Mannons, Orin reveals this fascination-revulsion syndrome most. His passionate attachment to his mothe., rife with sexual overtones, has kept him from marrying Hazel, but he is drawn by the girl's purity, and he sees her passionless love for him as cleansing. On their return from the Islands, he finds Lavinia's blossoming attractiveness repulsive—because he sees her now as desirable. The climax of the brother-sister relationship is Orin's proposal that they have incestuous relations ; this would both satisfy his desire and cement their mutual guilt. From the puritan point of view, the physical act of love between brother and sister is the fullest expression of their mutual damnation. The "curse" which began with David's seduction of Marie Brantome spirals down to an incestuous proposal. No seventeenth-century divine would conceive in more suitable symbol for the ultimate reprobation of the Mannons ; no libertarian would devise a clearer picture of the fascination-revulsion combination that Mencken and his school saw in puritanism.

Conventional Puritanism

The attitudes of the townspeople-chorus underscore the conventionality of the play's puritanism. The middle-class conspiracy which aspires to Babylonian practices while proclaiming Christian values weds hypocrisy with a practical view of sex. The women gossip in orthodox fashion ; coming away from Ezra's wake, Mrs. Hills blurts out : "You remember, Everett, you've always said about the Mannons that pride goeth before a fall and that some day God would humble them in their sinful pride." This version embarrasses the company ; afterward the men draw aside for a less pious assessment. They make sniggering references to the General's love-making as the probable cause of his angina. The lower classes are even blunter about their sexual preoccupation. Before the climax of the second play, the murder of Adam by Orin, the drunken sailor who serves as chorus complains about the "yaller-haired pig who put her arm around me so lovin' " and then cleaned his pockets. Similarly, in the knocking-on-the-gate episode which opens *The Hunted*, the cron es who gather round the gardener allow that Christine was a "looker". One offers to let her ghost sit on his lap if "ghosts look like the living". The middle-class and the proletariat fill out the picture ; they reflect Mencken's contention that the puritan sexual code does not really present the aspirations of the society. And, while practice and appearances may differ among the classes, their attitudes with regards to sex have a common root ; sex is animal and degrading, not to be associated with "pure" love.

Limitations of Puritanism

O'Neill's understanding of puritanism provides conscious motivation for the personae. The Mannons think in puritan categories ; they see their plight in these terms. But the playwright and the audience see their actions in a wider context that conflicts with but also in some sense explains, the puritan mentality. Puritanism does not clarify the darker matters that make the action inevitable, that link crime to crime in necessary progress.

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Freudianism in Mourning Becomes Electra Or Influence of Psycho-Analysis on Mourning Becomes Electra

Freudianism and Crime

Freudian theories of character are a version of reality that explains the crimes of the Mannons as their puritan heritage explains their feelings of guilt. When intellectuals of the twenties characterized puritanism as repressive, they were using a word that has explicit Freudian sanction. When O'Neill chose Freudian psychology to motivate the action, he extended the dimensions of his play-world into areas as broad as the Olympus of Aeschylus. The Freudian view of behaviour invokes a region as mysterious as the dwelling-place of the gods and sees human motivation as guided by impulses as imperative as divine commands. As the social dimension of O'Neill's action extends into the puritan past, so the broader dimension extends into the unconscious where drives are determined by infantile experience.

Unscientific Freudianism

Like the puritanism, the Freudianism of the play is popular and unscientific. *Mourning Becomes Electra* is not a carefully documented case study nor was intended to be. The fact that the doctrines of Freud were widely misunderstood and vastly oversimplified by the public and the popularizers, did not prevent the playwright or the novelist—who often did not understand them either—from using the attitudes towards human behaviour that the theories suggested. However imprecisely, the public knew that Freud insisted on the relevance of the sex drive to life-adjustment, on the dangers of repression, on the importance of dreams as a key

to self-knowledge in these areas. The unconscious or subconscious was a deep, dark, cellar-like place from which proceeded equally dark impulses like the urge to marry your mother ; repression was a dangerous damming-up of such urges and led to abnormal inversions. The biological determinism of nineteenth-century Naturalism also had prepared the ground for the psychological determinism of these theories. Whether or not the public approved, Freudianism, as it was understood or misundertood, represented in the 1920's a definite complex of attitudes about the importance of the psyche as a key to human behaviour.

O'Neill's Psychological Intuitions

O'Neill himself insisted that his knowledge of the psychoanalysts was unscientific and fragmentary, and that he was guided more by intuition than by any theory :

> There is no conscious use of psychoanalytic material in any of my plays. All of them could easily be written by any dramatist who had never heard of the Freudian theory and it was simply guided by an intuitive psychological insight into human beings and their life-impulsions that is as old as Greek drama. It is true that I am enough a student of modern psychology to be familiar with the Freudian implications inherent in the actions of some of my characters while I was portraying them ; but this was always an afterthought and never consciously was I for a moment influenced to shape my material along the lines of any psychologial theory. It was my dramatic instinct and my personal experience with human life that alone guide me.

Autobiographical Element

There are pieces of autobiography to which O'Neill could have pointed to justify his stand, for instance, Jamie O'Neill's devotion to his mother and the fact that Eugene always thought that this devotion kept his brother unmarried. Eugene's own attachment to his mother was deep and firm, even under the strain of Ellen O'Neill's dope addiction. In his own experience, too, there was the idealistic Irish-Catholic identification of mother with the Virgin—a Jansenistic preoccupation with purity that was tied tightly to the mother-image. In the broader cultural perspective, there is the American reverence for "Ma" that assumes almost a mythical proportions in folk traditions. The woman keeps the flame, "not only of the hearth, but of duty and purity and faith and hope" in a rude masculine world. Nonetheless, in spite of O'Neill's contention, there is a psychological theory built into the plot and characters of *Mourning Becomes Electra.* If O'Neill is working from his own

experience, he interprets it according to the categories that popular Freudianism offered him. That hypothesis attached a darker significance to the traditional attachment to mother, and to mother's attachment to her "boy". The folk tale attitude towards mother, the American experience and O'Neill's own heritage established a background for the Freudian position and indicate how the playwright is likely to interpret the "complexes".

Specific Details of Freudianism

The specific details of O'Neill's Freudianism in *Mourning Becomes Electra* are elaborated from the oversimplified proposition that every male is attracted to the woman who resembles his mother in physical appearance and every female desires a man who resembles her father. The prototype of the female in the play is Marie Brantome. Christine and Lavinia both resemble her, especially in their "peculiar shade of coppergold hair". Adam says to Lavinia : "Lavinia, you're so like your mother in some ways. Your face is the dead image of hers. And look at your hair. You won't meet hair like yours and hers again in a month of Sundays. I only know one other woman who had it. You'll think it strange when I tell you. It was my mother." The Mannon women are identified with one another through this symbol. The Mannon men, too, look alike – Adam, Ezra and Orin. These similarities visualize the tangled, interlocked relationship among the members of the family at the same time as they "explain" them. Given this pattern, according to the Freudian hypothesis, the involvements are predictable. Adam loves Christine ; Lavinia loves her father, Adam and Orin ; Ezra loves his wife and daughter ; Orin loves his mother and his sister. Reciprocally Lavinia hates Christine ; Adam hates Ezra and Orin ; Orin hates rivals for his mother's love, Adam and Ezra. Christine's revulsion for her husband is explained by another Freudian postulate, her unfortunate experience on her wedding night, presumably Ezra's ineffective love making. Orin's complex and Lavinia's are treated specifically in the course of the dialogue ; Lavinia has a fixation on her father and her brother, and Orin is still his mother's "boy".

Orin's Mother-Complex

Orin's mother complex is developed at some length. He has had his mother's love, he is her "baby". And his love for her, while rife with sexual overtones, is reverential. His greeting on their first encounter in the play contains a curious juxtaposition : "Mother ! God, it is good to see you !" Christine deals with him in seductive terms, emphasizing the physical in their relationship : "You're a big man now, aren't you ? I can't believe it. It seems only yesterday when I used to find you in your night shirt hiding in the hall upstairs on the chance that I'd come up and you'd get one more

goodnight kiss." According to the play, the "Oedipus complex" arises because the mother loves the father too little and the son too much. This Freudian hypothesis explains the attraction and attachments that motivate the events—each Mannon is drawn by an unconscious impulse to that person who resembles the parent of the opposite sex. In Orin and Lavinia, the third generation, this impulse has grown into a fixation, a love-hate directed primarily at mother. The most illuminating instance of the operation of this Freudianism is the hero's mother-fixation. His fate turns on his complex ; in him the pattern of psychological forces work out to a conclusion. He is mother's boy, with all that implies, and his attachment, moreover, includes an explicit connection of mother with peace, innocence and the security of infancy. While away at war, Orin dreamt of his mother as an Island of peace. The playwright leaves little to the imagination. The Island surrounds Orin ; it is warm, secure amid the wash of waters. It does not take a particularly acute dream-diagnostician to recognize the desire to return to the womb. Supplementary to this dream was the illusion that each man he killed at the front resembled his father. The wish to possess mother and the acting out of the father-murder give Orin the classic Oedipal symptoms. This complex moves him to murder Adam, and the brunt of his hatred falls on the father-figure, not on the mother. Christine's presence always has a softening effect. When he witnesses Christine's disintegration because of Adam's death, he pleads with her : "Mother ! Don't moan like that ! How could you grieve for that servant's bastard ? I knew he was the one who planned Father's murder ! You couldn't have done that ! He got you under his influence to revenge himself ! ...But you'll forget him ! I'll make you forget him ! I'll make you happy." In the midst of his jealousy, he is suffering from fractured idealism a desire to preserve his mother immaculate.

Lavinia Becomes Mother

This image of Mother remains inviolate throughout the play. As Mother, Christine symbolizes "pre-natal, noncompetitive freedom from fear", as O'Neill says elsewhere. Even Christine's rejection of Lavinia does not make her an "unnatural mother" ; it is the result of not being able to consider Lavinia *her* child. And Lavinia's hatred screens a longing for mother-love. After Christine's suicide Lavinia becomes Mother—she has assumed Christine's function along with her personality. She takes care of Orin, watches over him. More than ever Orin is caught by his complex : Orin says to Lavinia : "You don't know how like Mother you've become, Vinnie. I don't mean only how pretty you've gotten.........I mean the change in your soul, too... .. Little by little it grew like Mother's soul—as if you were stealing hers—as if her death had set you free to become her." And further he says : "Can't you see I'm now in Father's place and you're Mother ?" The transformation into "Father and Mother" is complete, and Orin's complex made completely explicit,

when he makes his proposal to his sister : "I love you now with all the guilt in me—the guilt we share ! Perhaps I love you too much, Vinnie...... There are times now when you don't seem to be my sister, nor Mother, but some stranger with the same beautiful hair—". He touches her hair caressingly. She pulls violently away. He laughs wildly. He continues, "Perhaps you're Marie Brantome, eh ? And you say there are no ghosts in the house." Lavinia says, "For God's Sake—! No ! You're insane ! You can't mean—!" Then Orin says, "How else can I be sure you won't leave me ? You would never dare leave me then. You would feel as guilty as I do ! You would be as damned as I am !" By taking Lavinia, Orin would fulfil his desire to possess Mother completely ; he would also be able to share the burden of his guilt. The pivotal point of the action here is Lavinia's horror at Orin's proposal ; there is simply no question in her mind of actual incest. Lavinia in the Islands and with "clean, honest Peter" was sufficiently emancipated : "Any love is beautiful." But emancipation draws the line at incest. The mother is ultimately attainable only by another, even darker, door.

Orin's Return to Personal Unconscious

Stripped of its "Island" imagery, the way back to the womb, to peace and security, is a return to the oblivion of personal unconsciousness. Orin cannot confess his guilt publicly ; he cannot face life with its burden. When Lavinia cries out that he should commit suicide, he hears his mother's voice : he says, "Yes, that would be justice—now you are Mother ! She is speaking now through you !...... It's the way to peace—to find her again—my lost Island—Death is an Island of Peace, too—Mother will be waiting for me there." Orin's suicide is presented as a return to Mother ; this is the judgment rendered by his complex. Death is the way to peace, rest, freedom from fear. It is also a passage into oblivion.

Freudian Undertones

As Orin's suicide is the judgment levelled by his complex, Lavinia's self-immurement is the judgment of her puritan heritage and her complex. She tries to break out of the circle, to escape with Peter and live, but her resolution breaks down when, in a Freudian slip, she calls Peter "Adam". The dead thrusting themselves between —her love for Adam, Orin's jealousy sealed in an incriminating letter. She accepts this fate with puritan spirit and locks herself in the Mannon house to live with the ghosts of the past in expiation for all their crimes. The "Mannon way" catches Lavinia in the end ; being born is starting to die. The house is a sepulchre, and her life henceforth a living death. So her determination—so much admired by the humanist critics—really amounts to the same decision Orin makes. She shuts herself off from the world to await the inevitable end. In Lavinia and Orin the Freudian and the puritan, so opposed in particulars, meld into a unity.

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Destructive Power of The Romantic Ideal in Mourning Becomes Electra

O'Neill's Anti-Romanticism

S. K. Winther says: "Critical thought in the modern world has been a relentless enemy of the romantic ideal, and no modern writer has attacked it more consistently or more bitterly than Eugene O'Neill." The exaggerated romanticism which enveloped the American theatre nurtured the mind of O'Neill's youth and provoked the rebellion of his maturity. Against that tradition his plays are a direct challenge. He hates the false dreams and false ideals and false endings that have dominated the American stage and are still the inspiration of the Movies.

Romantic Ideals as Disease

To O'Neill these ideals are not harmless entertainment, but a virulent disease that has eaten into the core of life, rotting and destroying the only hope for salvation that is possible for man. O'Neill believes that man's hope lies in his being willing to face life as it is, accepting its limitations and, on the foundations of these very shortcomings, erecting a new world free from the tyranny of romantic dogmatism.

Criticism Versus Seduction

The creative imagination will not always obey the logic of cold reason, and nothing is more characteristic of O'Neill than the conflict between his criticism of the romantic ideal and the manner in which he succumbs, at times to its seductive appeal. I doubt if there is a character in the whole range of his work who could be described as truly realistic in the sense that Bazarov, Pelle, or Sister Carrie might

be called realists. Perhaps the greatness of O'Neill's characters lies in this very fact : that they are too complex, too involved with the cross current of life to be purely one thing or the other. Their conflicts give them a quality which inspires confidence in their humanity and enlists the reader's sympathy and understanding in a way that more consistent and unified personalities never could.

The Dreamy Eyes

A study of the men and women that move through the world of O'Neill's dramas reveals some noteworthy characteristics that many of them have in common. One is impressed by the courage and fortitude with which they face the unfavourable circumstances of the world in which they live. They are determined to give life meaning and value in defiance of a world that is impersonal and unconcerned about the ambitions of human beings. It is not this characteristic that I wish to emphasize at this point but something that is purely physical and, at the same time, suggests a hidden romantic passion in the nature of O'Neill. Buried deep in his inner being is a love for some quality that the materialistic interpretation of life does not seem to bring out in its proper perspective. In order to discover just what this is, it will be necessary to note, in some detail, his descriptions of the leading characters in many different plays to observe what physical characteristics they have in common. In the pursuit of this study a curious fact comes to light. No matter who the character may be or what his occupation or position in the social order is, the favourite character of an O'Neill play has dreamy eyes. His characters live in two worlds : one the outward world of physical reality, the other, a world of unfulfilled and passionate desire. This latter world is one which the dreamer wishes for with all the pent-up powers of his being. To this world he will sacrifice all that life has given him, for there is nothing in life that for a moment is comparable to the genuine reality of his dream. Captain Bartlett commits murder because his longed for dream of pirate treasure seems to have come true, and in another play, another sea captain sacrifices the sanity of his wife in order that his desire for a full load of whale oil may become a reality.

Tragedy of ..omantic Ideal

The incest theme began in *Dynamo*, and in a sense wrecked the play, only to find its proper expression in the story of General Mannon's family. The tragedy that ends with Lavinia's resolve to "Live alone with the dead, and keep their secrets" began in the home of her grandfather long before she was born. Ezra Mannon as a child had been in love with Marie Brantome, but it was his uncle, David, who was the successful lover. So deep was Abe Mannon's resentment against his brother who had stolen the affection of the young woman that he himself had loved—loved in the thwarted

Mannon sense of love, which dares not face the truth—that he drove him and his sweetheart from his home, and eventually destroyed the house in order that all members of the cursed experience might be obliterated forever from his life.

False Romantic Ideal

In that episode begins the false romantic ideal which finds its culmination years later in the grandson as accomplice in the murder of his uncle and the long series of crimes that follow. From the beginning the misfortunes of the Mannons grow out of an inability to face the reality of life. They live by false Puritan standards of behaviour. They did not know and could not learn that man as a psychological phenomenon is doomed to disaster if compelled to live within the confines of a limited creed. One by one "Death came tacitly and took them" from the sunlight of a world they had never seen except through the coloured glass of the "Meeting House" windows. They didn't know what it was all about until too late to learn a new way of life.

Romantic Ambiguity of the Islands

The world tour of Orin and Lavinia is one of the great tragic conceptions of O'Neill, for these two children are doubly doomed because they do not know that their tragedy lies within, and that were they able to flee from the plane itself they would still bear it with them. As they travel they make one faint gesture in the direction of freedom, but the scars on the past had left a tissue which inhibited forever a turn into a new world. I refer to the Islands of the South Seas that had been so dear to the memory of Captain Brant, and dear also to the imagination of O'Neill as they were to Melville, one of the very few authors that are mentioned by name in O'Neill plays. No single passage in the play touches the heart more than Orin's sad speech in which he tells of these Islands with a bitterness born of his disillusionment. For, as he says "They turned out to be Vinnie's Islands. not mine. They only made me sick — and the naked women disgusted me. I guess I'm too much of a Mannon, after all, to turn into a pagan." To Lavinia they were real, they were an escape, so she thought, from all that had cursed her family for generations. They were to her all that her young lover had promised her, but she could not accept that which she wanted. The cruel hand of tradition led her back to her doom, where she told Peter the story of the Islands in these words : "I loved those Islands. They finished setting me free. There was something there mysterious and beautiful—a good spirit—of love—coming out of the land and sea. It made me forget death. There was no hereafter. There was only this world—the warm earth in the moonlight—the trade wind in the coco palms—the surf on the reef—the fires at night and the drum throbbing in my heart—the natives dancing naked and innocent—without knowledge of sin.

Realization Comes Too Late

It is a characteristic of the Mannons that they knew or realized in a dim sort of way what was wrong with them, but always the realization came too late to set straight their crooked path of life. General Mannon discovered a new philosophy on the night that he was murdered, a discovery that, made twenty years earlier, would have saved him and his family. And what may he said of him in this respect may be said of many of O'Neill's characters with reference to the romantic ideal. An uncritical analysis might lead a reader to believe that O'Neill had stacked the fates against them. The opposite is really true, for it is typical of the romantic dreamer that he does not, nor can he, comprehend the falsity of his position until it is put to the crucial test, and then it is too late to turn back. It is O'Neill's clear development of this point that gives tragic reality to his work, and it is the failure to grasp this truth which has led many people to condemn him. But he is too much of an artist not to realize truly a fact of life that is the very essence of his own nature. He is the romantic dreamer who knows the deadly power of the dream's appeal. In his life, as in his work, he has striven against it, and out of the struggle he has created the bitter tragic beauty of his art. He never forgets that life will exact a double toll from those who believe that dreaming of what life ought to be will make it other than it is.

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Symbolic Setting of Mourning Becomes Electra

Great Dramatic Achievement

The symbolic setting of *Mourning Becomes Electra* is a great achievement in dramatic craftsmanship. It suggests the inherent conflict in the Mannon family and the attraction and repulsion regulating the lives of its members.

Symbolism of Vegetation

When we take in the "special curtain" at the beginning of the play, we see the extensive Mannon estate which offers us a background story of sorts and introduces it to the major conflict in the trilogy, that between green paganism and gray puritanism. "As seen from the street" implies from the perspective of the town-dwellers (the world outside including the audience), the estate with its "extensive grounds" is most impressive. From a distance it appears "purty" to us as it does to the town chorus.

Symbolism of Colours

Once inside the estate we can better see what the house is like: at front is the driveway which leads up to the house from the two entrances on the street. Behind the driveway the white Grecian temple portico with its six tall columns extends across the stage. A big pine tree is on the lawn at the edge of the drive before the right corner of the house. Its trunk is a black column in striking contrast to the white columns of the portico...... It is shortly before sunset and the soft light of the declining sun shines directly on the front of the house, shimmering in a luminous mist on the white portico and the grey stone wall behind, intensifying the whiteness of the columns, the sombre grayness of the wall, the green of the open shutters, the green of the lawn and the shrubbery, the black and green of the pine tree. The white columns cast black bars of shadow on the gray wall

behind them. The windows of the lower floor reflect the sun's ray in a resentful glare. The temple portico is like an incongruous white mask fixed on the house to hide its sombre gray ugliness. Surrounded by "the green beauty of their land", the Mannons—so the curtain told us—"live in as near the Garden of Paradise......as you'll find on this earth", to quote Adam's description of the South Sea Islands. Or so they would if it was not for the house. After generations of nature-trimming puritanism Abe Mannon, out of revenge on the love he was incapable of himself and which was therefore denied to him by Marie Brantome, tore down the old mansion and built his monstrous "temple of Hate and Death". Yet the vegetation that still surrounds the Mannon estate indicates that nature and the spirit of love, if repressed, are not extinguished. The white portico, like the puritan version of the story, which is the one offered to the world, is a false facade hiding the grim truth visualized in the house itself, the truth, which says that hatred rather than righteousness and revenge rather than justice, motivated Abe's destruction of the old house and erection of the present one. Visualizing modern man's dilemma, the Mannon house is fittingly a "grotesque perversion of everything Greek temple expressed of meaning of life". In its imitation of pagan love of life, beauty, and purity, the portico is incongruously a part of the puritan house built in hatred of life and love ; it is itself a perversion of the pagan spirit, for its whiteness is biblical and sepulchral rather than Greek.

Inescapability of Fate

The inescapability of the fate is underlined by the static setting : the house—exterior or interior is nearly always before our eyes. Only once—in the ship scene close to the middle of the trilogy—do the Mannons get away from it. Here for a brief moment, the sea promises "escape and release", but the escape is illusory and the main effect of this futile attempt at breakthrough is, in fact, a strengthening of the feeling that the characters are chained to the house, doomed to spend their lives in it. Fittingly, Ezra, Christine, Orin, and eventually, we must assume, Lavinia, all die in the house which symbolizes the Mannon way of life, in the house which has worked their destruction : Ezra in the matrimonial bed which he had abused by his inability to love his wife naturally ; Christine in the room where she succumbed to the evil Mannon spirit the moment she decided to murder her husband ; Orin in the room where his mother committed suicide, partly due to his Mannon harshness.

Monster-Like House

The house is like a monster swallowing its own breed. Its windows are "revengeful eyes", rejecting rather than accepting the warm sunlight, and the shutters are like eyelids. The play begins with open windows and shutters, but when Ezra returns the windows and shutters are closed ; the house front becomes a death mask,

expressive both of Ezra's life-denying puritanism and Christine's evil spirit. When Ezra tells her about the Mannon death worship, she keeps her eyes closed, her face resembling a death mask, indicating that she is a victim of the very tradition he is commenting on and which is expressed in the house front. He asks her to open her eyes, but almost immediately entreats her to close them again—an illustration, it seems, of Ezra's willingness but utter inability to free Christine of her death mask. The shutters remain closed also after Ezra's death, for which his corpse in it, the house is literally a tomb and besides it is now Lavinia who rules the house.

The Mannon House

In the third part Lavinia's attitude has changed. It is now Orin who locks himself up behind closed blinds on the study, hiding from the world with his guilt. Lavinia, on the other hand, is firmly determined to drive the ghosts away. She has strength enough to open the shutters in the study, claiming that the air in it is suffocating for Orin—as indeed it will shortly prove to be : soon he is to kill himself in the study. It is also due to her that the shutters are fastened back and that the windows are open in the final act With Orin dead and escape from the Mannons imminent, Lavinia repeats her mother's worship of light and air. Then, in a crushing *anagnorisis*, she discovers that she can rid herself of the evil Mannon spirit only by living with it. She closes her eyes, that is, she 'dies'. And, without opening her eyes she says strangely as if to herself : "Why can't the dead die !" She is not merely thinking of the Mannon ghosts ; she is also addressing herself, wishing her own death. 'Dead' herself now, it only remains for her, the last Mannon, to prepare her own tomb. She orders the shutters nailed tight and buries herself in the darkened house which seems to be her tomb.

Symbolism of the Shrubbery

Of the rich vegetation revealed in the special curtain, the stage picture shows only the blooming lilac shrubbery on the left and one of the pine trees on the right. Christine is linked with the shrubbery ; she appears close to it twice on her way to and back from the flower garden, the second time carrying a bunch of flowers. The pine tree is visually linked with the house, the dark green of its needles matching the dark green shutters, its column-like trunk in form resembling the house columns and in colour the black bars they cast on the house, turning it, as it were, into a prison. As an evergreen never visibly in bloom (and in this respect contrasting with the rest of the surrounding vegetation) and mournful in colour, it adequately expresses the Mannon sterility and hatefulness When O'Neill at one point makes Ezra appear close to and turned towards the pine tree, he may wish to underline the fact that the man's feelings of hatred and jealousy do not merely concern the present

situation but also a traumatic experience in the past. Christine's rejection of him (in favour of Adam) reminds him of Marie Brantome who similarly rejected him and his father Abe, in favour of David.

Lavinia and the Pine Tree

More obviously, Lavinia is connected with the pine tree, her black costume in colour resembling the trunk of the tree. We are reminded of that especially towards the very end when Lavinia, like an ebony pillar—O'Neill's description of the pine tree—woodenly passes between the white columns of the house on her way into its gloomy darkness. Six unnatural deaths—those of David, Marie, Ezra, Adam, Christine and Orin—have occurred in the family since Abe Mannon built his temple of Hate and Death ; there are six puritan columns in front of the tomb-like house. Differing from the other Mannons—except Abe—both by her excessive guilt and by her decision to punish herself to death-in-life, Lavinia is like a seventh black column matching the tree, symbol of the Mannons', especially Abe's, life hatred. As hateful as the grandfather, she has no Mannon to punish—but herself.

The Light Green Vegetation

Unlike the pine trees, the rest of the vegetation is light green—it is either spring or summer—and subordinated to the seasonal and lifelike rhythm of budding, blooming, decay, death. As we have noted, it links the estate with the Islands. This is especially true of the flowers, worn by the natives in Dionysian fashion, "stuck over their ears", symbols of youthful innocence, happiness and love. Thus Christine's brightening up of the Mannon "tomb" with flowers is not merely a sign of her joyous acceptance of Adam, her lover, or even of her attempt to transform the deadly house into a temple of love. As an unhappy, ageing and guilt-ridden woman—she is already planning to murder her husband—Christine longs for all the values represented by the flowers. Her act is one of exorcism.

A Life Without Flowers

This is even more true of Lavinia in the final act. Repeating her mother's flower-picking, she is much more desperate. Filling every room in the house with flowers, she frankly tells Peter : "Take me in this house of the dead and love me ! Our love will drive the dead away !" But her black costume, unlike her mother's green, harmonizes, not with the flowers, but with the dark pine tree. At last she realizes and accepts her Mannon nature. Her final words are : "......tell Hannah to throw out all the flowers". Innocence, happiness and love are incompatible with the Mannon house and do not become Lavinia. It adds considerably to her tragic stature that, despite the intense love for flowers she has just demonstrated, she has the strength to condemn herself to a life without them.

27

Symbolic Lighting in Mourning Becomes Electra

Psychological Significance of Lighting

O'Neill employs lighting not merely to evoke a mood but to suggest an inner state of mind as well as a relationship between man and some external fate. Thus, in *Thirst* the author makes it clear that the sun that scorches the three human wrecks on the life raft represents a punishing divinity. The lighting in the first act of *Gold* bears an obvious resemblance to the one in *Thirst*. Again we are introduced to the thirst-maddened survivors of a shipwreck in the tropic seas. In *The Hairy Ape* lighting plays a part in underlining the contrast between the modes of life of two classes in modern society, the superrace and the subrace. In *Fog* the gradual dissolving of the fog is obviously O'Neill's device to bring the play to a conclusion – the rescue ship discovers the lifeboat when the fog has lifted—but the playwright has treated the weather condition as something more than a plot device.

Exterior and Interior Lighting

Both the exterior and the interior lighting receive great attention in *Mourning Becomes Electra*. The exterior sequence is carefully patterned. Part I opens shortly before sunset, progresses towards sunset and twilight to moonlit night and dawn. Part II is set on two consecutive moonlit nights. Part III opens shortly after sunset, progresses towards black night to sunlit late afternoon. It will appear from this that no act is set in broad daylight, and that the Mannons move from initial sunlight through a nocturnal period back to sunlight. The two glimpses of light in the middle acts—the dawn of Part I. IV and the sunset glow of Part III.I - provide no light for the Mannons ; in the former act the closed shutters only permit a little light to enter Ezra's bedroom ; in the latter Lavinia and Orin do not appear until it has grown dark.

Orin and the Light Sequence

The meaning of this light sequence is found in Orin's clairvoyant words : "I hate the daylight. It's like an accusing eye ! No, we've renounced the day, in which normal people live—or rather it has renounced us. Perpetual night—darkness of death in life—that's the fitting habitat for guilt." If the middle acts may be said to represent the life-denying puritan mind and the deeds of darkness it gives rise to, the framing sunlight acts may be taken to visualize the sinless, pagan love of nature embraced by the Islanders. On the Islands, Brant recalls, the sun is "drowsing in your blood", that is, man experiences God inside him in a kind of Dionysian rapture. A similar drunken, "drowsing" effect seems conveyed in the opening and closing acts by the soft, luminous sunlight "mist", which is rejected by the Mannon windows but embraced by Christine in the first and by Lavinia in the last act.

Symbolism of Sunlight

"A house drunk with sun" is precisely what we see at the beginning of Part I.II, where the glow of the setting sun fills Ezra's study. Christine's spirit still rules the house ; the light is warm ; God still seems benevolent. But the light changes : "As the action progresses this (the glow) becomes brighter, then turns to crimson, which darkens to sombreness at the end." Although O'Neill does not indicate exactly when the light changes occur, the subject matter of the act provided relatively safe indications. Thus the light becomes painfully bright, we may assume, as Lavinia plays the judge to her mother, virtually reducing Christine to a prisoner. It turns crimson as Christine, in revolt against this "imprisonment", makes up her mind to kill Ezra and plots the murder with Brant. And it "darkens to sombreness" as she is left alone, an ageing woman with a deed of darkness on her mind. Thus, ironically, we witness how Christine's struggle for light only brings on the darkness.

Symbolism of Darkness

Beginning to fall as Christine unwittingly succumbs to the evil Mannon spirit, the darkness grows into night, the "fitting habitat" of the Mannons, as Ezra returns home. Yet Ezra's life of "perpetual night" is soon to be replaced by the light beyond death ; he dies at daybreak.

Symbolic Meaning of Moonlight

In Part II, opening two days after Ezra's death, the moonlight, which earlier seemed romantic and "beautiful" to Christine, so like the warm moonlight over the Islands, she now finds chilly and

haunting. These remarks prepare for the sharp light division in Part II. V :

> The moon has just risen. The right half of the house is in the black shadow cast by the pine trees but the moonlight falls full on the part to the left of the doorway......
>
> CHRISTINE is discovered walking back and forth on the drive before the portico, passing from moonlight into the shadow of the pines and back again. She is in frightful state of tension, unable to keep still.

Symbolism of Light and Darkness

On the left are the innocent life values : the flower garden, the lilac shrubbery. On the right are the guilty death values : the Mannon portraits, the pine grove. The lighting underlies this stage symbolism. In the opening of the trilogy we found Christine an ally of the light. Once her crime was conceived, she became associated with the darkness. Now, when the crime has been executed. we find her torn between the two, no longer belonging in the innocent life realm on the left and fighting desperately against the guilty death realm on the right. Haunted by the Island moonlight and the avenging Mannon furies, she can find no peace—until she faces her guilt and thereby frees herself from it. She does it by killing herself before the portrait of her husband-victim, now her judge, in the moonlit study. Death being her atonement she is brought away from the avenging furies ; at least she belongs wholly to the light.

Death in Light

Adam, too, finds a death in light. Falling down by the Mannon pine table in the cabin of the "Flying Trades", he dies directly below the skylight letting in the moonlight.

Impenetrable Darkness

More deeply plunged in guilt than their parents, Lavinia and Orin are victims of a more impenetrable darkness. Lavinia says, "It's black as pitch tonight. There isn't a star." And Orin says sombrely, "Darkness without a star to guide us ! Where are we going, Vinnie ?" Ezra and Christine still had the moonlight ; Orin's and Lavinia's night is a night without hope.

The Redemptive Light

Like his mother, Orin can see no way out of darkness but death. O'Neill was here faced with an intricate problem. How-

could he show that Orin's death, which takes place at night, is as much a journey into light as are those of the other Mannons ? To change the lighting in the act was impossible. Thus, since it could not be suggested visually, it had to be done verbally Awaiting Orin's death Lavinia cries out: "I love everything that grows simply—up toward the sun—everything that is straight and strong! I hate what's warped and twists and eats into itself and dies for a lifetime in shadow .....I can't bear waiting—waiting and waiting and waiting—!" What Lavinia here expresses "hysterically" in words, Orin performs offstage in action. Her anguish is his; he, even more than she, cannot "bear waiting" for the sun. Facing his victim—his mother—in death, his suicide is a recognition of his guilt; the Furies are appeased, and as his life ceases, the darkness, we may assume, gives way to the redemptive light.

The Final Sunlight

The final sunlight act parallels and contrasts with the initial one. Christine's struggle for light and air was precarious but not hopeless—until she decided to get what she wanted through murder. After three 'murders' Lavinia's parallel struggle in the final act is doomed from the outset. We see it in her costume, pitch-black like the Mannon night, and in her eyes which like the windows of the house, reject the sunlight, then close it altogether, leaving her soul in the same darkness which she shortly proclaims on the interior of the house by ordering the shutters closed "so no sunlight can ever get in". Since it is late afternoon we know that the interior darkness will soon be matched by an exterior one. Lavinia, as Orin had predicted, cannot escape the "fitting habitat for guilt"; the rest of her life will be a "perpetual night".

Islands of Light and Love

Yet it is significant that while the coming darkness is implied, it is not visibly suggested. For on the metaphysical level the trilogy ends in light as it began in light, visualizing man's journey from birth to life and to rebirth, from belonging to isolation and then to renewed belonging. Beyond the strange dark interlude of life, separating us from the eternal, benevolent, divine light, Lavinia too will find, in recompense for her earthly suffering, her Islands of light and love. As Hazel tells her: "I know your conscience will make you do what's right—and God will forgive you"

The Interior Light

Orin not only explains the significance of the exterior darkness: he also makes the meaning of the interior light—he is sitting close to a table lamp in his father's old study—emphatically clear: "I find artificial light more appropriate for my work—man's light, not

God's—man's feeble striving to understand himself, to exist for himself in the darkness ! It's a symbol of his life—a lamp burning out in a room of waiting shadows !" A lamp—or a candle. Before Ezra is murdered he performs a significant illustrative act :

Mannon : We'd better light the light and talk a while.

Christine : (*With dread*) I don't want to talk ! I prefer the dark.

Mannon : I want to see you. (*He takes matches from the stand by the bed and lights the candle on it...... His face, with the flickering candlelight on its side, has a grim, bitter expression*). You like the dark where you can't see your old man of a husband, is that it ?

At the outset of the play, Christine was linked with the light ; while Ezra, when he first appeared, advertized his belonging to the darkness by stopping in the shade. Now we find their traditional alliances reversed. Christine began to move towards the Mannon darkness of hatred and guilt the moment she decided to trap her lover by making him an accomplice in her murder. Ezra, on the other hand, sickened by his professional 'murdering' in the war, has moved from his ancestral death worship towards the light of love and life. There is a stark irony in this reversal of roles, in the fact that Christine, the amateur murderer, kills Ezra, the professional one, precisely when he reveals himself willing to surrender to her original life affirmation.

Blowing Out the Life Flame

Ezra has thus come home determined to understand and love Christine. But he needs her help to kindle the ashes of their love ; together they must "light the light" and make life liveable. Yet it is Ezra alone who lights the candle. The table lamp next to Christine remains unlit. Christine, as Ezra rightly assumes, does not want to understand him ; shortly—as the flickering candlelight indicates—she is to blow out his life flame.

Symbolism of Lamp and Candles

Lamp and candles return in the third scene of Part II. Behind Ezra's corpse, laid out in his study, there are two stands of three, lighted candles at each end of the black marble chimneypiece throwing their light above on the portrait and below on the dead

man. The six white candles on the black marble chimneypiece, clearly correspond to the six white columns of the portico in front of the stone-gray house proper and thus again fatefully remind us of the six human lives to be extinguished by the evil Mannon spirit. Properly, it may seem, there should be three unlit and three lit candles on the mantel, corresponding to the Mannons dead and those still alive. But such an arrangement would obviously have looked both obtrusive and strange. Moreover, it would have obscured the parallel to the outdoor columns. O'Neill was therefore satisfied to suggest the two kinds—the living and the dead—by grouping the candles in two trinities, an arrangement which, of course, also carries Christine connotations.

Another example of O'Neill's meticulous arrangement and numbering his light sources is seen in the fourth act of Part II. In the ship's cabin there is a lighted lamp on the sideboard and a ship's lantern, also lighted, at the right end of the table. The position of the characters in the cabin makes it easy to link the lamp with Christine and the lantern with Brant, the ship's captain.

Interior Lighting Versus The Mannon Darkness

In Part III the interior lighting, like the exterior one, fights an unsuccessful battle with the Mannon darkness. In the sitting-room scene Peter has lighted two candles on the mantel and put the lantern on the table at front. In this dim, spotty light the room is full of shadows. In the flickering candlelight the eyes of the Mannon portraits stare with a grim forbiddingness.

Visual Symbolism

The visual symbolism here strongly anticipates Orin's Maeterlinckian words about man's life being "a lamp burning out in a room of waiting shadows". The lantern, although it belongs to the barn, we connect with Brant, and if we take the two candles to represent the other two victims of the family fate, whose deaths we have witnessed—Ezra and Christine—we have in these three light sources an addition, as it were, to the Mannon portrait gallery, a visual indication of how these recently dead ones nourish and give life to avenging family force.

Lavinia's Quest For Enlightenment

If Orin is linked with the lamp in the study, Lavinia is connected with the one in the sitting-room. At curtain rise this lamp is lighted but turns low. Seth has informed us that ever since the house was first built in hate, its evil spirit has kept growing. Now, in the final interior act we can see how the fateful Mannon darkness

predominates. Orin has just made his incestuous proposal, but Lavinia wants to escape him and the Mannons and marry Peter. He is now Ezra, she is Christine and Peter recalls Brant. Entering the room in a terrific state of tension, Lavinia comes to the table and turns up the lamp. She wants enlightenment. "Show me the way to save him (Orin)", she entreats the portraits. But her act is also an echo of Christine's desperate struggle for life and love, a struggle that ironically is to bring Lavinia, as it did her mother, only closer to the Mannon darkness; in the end we see her entering the darkened house.

Links With Light Source

All the Mannons, we have found, are at one point or another linked with a light source, symbolizing their struggle for love and belonging in the darkness of life ; all the lamps—in the bedroom, study, sitting-room and cabin—are significantly placed on the left side, which we have identified as the 'pagan' or life area. But just as the blessed Island can be found only in death, so the true light—God's, not man's—can be found only beyond life. Thus we witness how, with all the Mannons, the "artificial" earthly light gives way to the eternal heavenly one.

28

Music and Songs in Mourning Becomes Electra

Power of Music

The high frequency of musical effects in O'Neill's plays is, in part, due to the unusual power of music to speak directly to our emotions. Far from being an alienating effect, music is used by O'Neill as an integral, mood-sustaining part of the plays. Behind his predilections for popular songs one divines the Romantic idea that folk song represents "original melody", a musical mirroring of the cosmos.

Singing and Life-Affirmation

In *Mourning Becomes Electra* singing is an expression of life-affirmation. Marie Brantome used to be laughing and singing—"frisky and full of life". And her nature, tempered by puritanism is retained in the good, healthy Hazel, whose sweet and clear and pure singing—as reminisced by Orin in the battlefield—is like a hymn to life rising above the grim 'music' of war : "the screams of the dying".

Dionysian Singing and Drinking

More discernibly Dionysian is the combined singing and drinking of Seth, the Chantyman and Joe Silva, a Portuguese fishing captain and member of the final chorus of old men. O'Neill carefully differentiates between their voices. The Chantyman's is a good tenor, Silva's a hoarse bass and Seth's the wraith of what once must have been a good baritone. The pitch and quality of the voices seem to illustrate their different attitudes to life as symbolized by the sea. Obviously Silva is prosaically, the Chantyman poetically, related to it ; while Seth, too long under the influence of life-hostile 'Mannonism' to be able fully to keep up the Dionysian spirit of music, is detached from it.

Opening With Music

Like the Greeks, O'Neill opens his play with music. In the distance, from the town, a band is heard playing "John Brown's Body". Borne on the light puffs of wind this music is at times quite loud, then sinks into faintness as the wind dies. From the left rear, a man's voice is heard singing the chanty "Shenandoah"—a song that more than any other holds in it the brooding rhythm of the sea. The voice grows quickly nearer. It is thin and aged, the wraith of what must once have been a good baritone. Just as the stage picture visually presents the theme and conflict of the trilogy, so the two intermingling tunes aurally suggest its combating forces : land and sea, war and peace, death and life. For here regular-beat, martial brass music is pitted against a melodious sea chanty sung by a frail human voice.

The Band-Playing

The band-playing is motivated by the fact that Lee's surrender is a matter of hours ; it is the music of the victorious Union Army. Although we do not hear the words of "John Brown's Body", the idea of slavery and the notion of souls who "go marching on" after death are relevant to the play, and O'Neill presumably took for granted that some of the most familiar lines were known to the audience. The foreground-background arrangement of the songs has a counterpart in the presence-absence of the characters : while we associate the distant war music with Ezra and Orin, we connect the sea chanty with Christine's primeval yearning for life in the full—represented by the "rolling river" of Shenandoah—a yearning which, to be sure, is shared by the Mannons, although it is repressed by their militant puritanism.

The Theme Song

"Shenandoah" is the theme song in the play. Occurring six times in the trilogy (twice in each part) and always at the beginning or end of the acts), interspersed with and commenting on the action, the chanty may be regarded as an equivalent of the choral songs in Greek tragedy. With the exception of the ship's scene (Part II. IV), where it is sung by Chantyman, it is always Seth, the 'chorus leader' and therefore the proper commentator on the action, who intones the chanty.

The first time it is heard, its importance is largely atmospheric. By the third act, the sea longing seems especially relevant to Christine and Brant, who hope to be "bound away" for their Island of love and once Ezra is killed, whereas the two lines of the second stanza added here—

Oh, Shenandoah, I love your daughter
A-way, my rolling river.

—suggest not only Brant's but all the Mannons' love for their life-affirming women.

In the ship's scene we have a division resemblant of the one in the opening act of the trilogy. O'Neill's phrasing helps to indicate this: "Borne on the wind the melancholy refrain of the capstan chanty "Shenandoah", sung by a chantyman with the crew coming in on the chorus, drifts over the water from a ship that is weighing anchor in the harbour. Half in and half out of the shadow of the waterhouse, the chantyman lies sprawled on his back, snoring in a drunken slumber. The sound of the singing seems to strike a responsive chord in his brain .....He begins to sing in a surprisingly good tenor voice, a bit blurry with booze now and sentimentally mournful to a degree, but still managing to get full value out of the chanty."

Music in the Foreground

Again there is a house and a singer in the foreground and a chorus—rather than a band—in the background. But this time songs and characters do not noticeably clash. Yet there is a contrast in situation. For while one chanty is sung at sea in its completely appropriate context—is the sea made audible—the other comes, drunkenly, from land, where it does not properly belong. Once we see that the Chantyman is not only resemblant of Seth but also, and much more so, of Brant, the meaning of this division becomes clear. After the cowardly murder of Ezra, Brant feels defiled and believes that a return to a meaningful life—life at sea—is impossible, that the sea, which "hates a coward", is through with him. The Chantyman's mournful singing and position on dry land bear out Brant's feeling of death-in-life as a consequence of his separation from the sea as well as his forebodings of death.

The Chantyman's Singing and Adam

The Chantyman's singing not only expresses Brant's feelings of disloyalty to the sea, for which retribution awaits him; it also establishes the nature of his disloyalty:

Oh, they call me Hanging Johnny
Away—ay—i—oh!
They says I hangs for money
Oh, hang, boys, hang!

They say I hanged my mother
Away—ay—i— oh!

They say I hanged my mother
Oh, hang, boys, hang !

This is obviously a description of Brant, who was partially responsible for his mother's death—a crime he has never been able to forget—and who was bribed into killing Ezra for the love of his wife and the ship.

Seth's "Shenandoah"

When Seth intones "Shenandoah" in the following act, we know that death is near at hand. But O'Neill surprises us just the same by allowing no time lapse between the two : Christine's suicide occurs even before Seth has finished the song ; the "sharp report" replaces the "Missouri" of the chanty as death takes the place of life But Seth, adding a new line to the song, takes away the grimness of death by assuring us that Christine is at peace "far across the stormy water" of life.

Death as Beautiful Mother Island

As we approach the end of the trilogy, the tension between the two meanings of the key words of the chanty makes itself more strongly felt. When the chanty is first heard, Orin has just been buried ; he too is "bound away" for the mother in death. But Lavinia still hopes to be "bound away" for life. She believes she can escape the Mannons by marrying Peter—until. finally, she too is forced to face her fate : "I'm bound here—to the Mannon dead !" Although Lavinia alone has the strength to accept the punishment of staying alive, her tragic insight does not differ from that of the other Mannons. All of them discover that the only alternative to being bound here for the "stormy water" of life is to be bound away for death ; that they cannot get near the beautifully rolling Shenandoah river—cannot attain harmonious oneness with life—until they have crossed the Missouri ; that death will then—and this is their final, consoling faith -reveal itself as a beautiful mother island.

29

Diction of *Mourning Becomes Electra*

O'Neill and Language

O'Neill has often been criticized for lacking the power of language. Yet there has been little consensus as to the nature of its defects or, for what matter, of its possible virtues. Most critics have found that the plays act better than they read, but sometimes the opposite view has been voiced. Fairly widespread is the opinion that O'Neill wrote reasonably good dialogue when he dealt with some kind of vernacular, but was at a loss when he attempted to catch ordinary middle-class language or soaring poetical speech. At times O'Neill's theatrical skill and imagination has been viewed as little more than a compensation for his deficiencies at language ; unable to put flowers in his language, he had to put some real ones on the stage.

O'Neill's Dramatic Inarticulations

O'Neill seems to agree with his detractors when admitting, in a letter to Quinn, that when composing *Mourning Becomes Electra* he was incapable of writing the "great language" the trilogy needed "to lift it beyond itself". But unlike most of the critics commenting on his language, O'Neill was not, when stating this, thinking of his own work in relation to that of other modern dramatists ; rather, he was measuring it against the dramatic masterpieces of the past, especially the *Oresteia* ; the letter continues :

> ...by way of self-consolation, I don't think, from the evidence of all that is being written today, that great language is possible for anyone living in the discordant, broken, faithless rhythm of our time. The best one can do is to be pathetically eloquent by one's moving, dramatic inarticulations !

A Bit of a Poet"

That this is precisely what O'Neill is attempting in his dialogue and that he considered himself utterly misunderstood by the critics in this endeavour appears from an earlier letter to Quinn in which he says " ..where I feel myself most neglected is just where I set most store by myself—a bit of a poet, who has labored with the spoken word to evolve original rhythms of beauty, where beauty apparently isn't—*Jones, Ape, God's Chillun, Desire*, etc."

Awkwardness of Language

Una Ellis-Fermor has rightly said that "a play which communicates to the audience only those passions or thoughts which the characters can communicate naturally to each other is in danger of becoming either superficial or colourless." In his dialogue O'Neill tries to circumvent these dangers. If the language of his characters often seems awkward, it is not because O'Neill was insensitive to idiomatic speech. Rather, the awkwardness stems from his disinterest in surface reality and concern with the underlying reality.

Realistic and Stylized Language

Attempting to write a language that is dramatic and is not just conversation, O'Neill tried to make his characters express their deeper, at times unconscious needs. Further, the typical O'Neill character, being part individual, part symbol, displays a characteristic fusion of realistic and stylized language.

The Tone of Language

O'Neill is very particular about his language in *Mourning Becomes Electra* in that every character of the play can be recognised by the language of his dialogue. Moreover, the tone of his language changes with the change of situation. Thus the language of the dialogues of chorus-characters is an admixture of slang and standard American language, whereas that of the rest of the characters is conversational language.

But the most remarkable aspect of the diction of the play is the slip of the tongue. The *lapsus linguae*, that is, the slip of the tongue has been used with great effectiveness by dramatists long before Freud paid attention to its psychological significance. In a narrow sense the *lapsus linguae* may be defined as the introduction of a word or phrase which is contradictory to the speaker's conscious intention as established by the context ; it may therefore be interpreted as the expression of a repressed wish.

Orin's Slip of the Tongue

In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, Orin slips in the opposite direction when, insensitive to the fact that Ezra is dead, he jealously tells Hazel that Lavinia is "always coddling Father and he likes it". Shuddering, Christine draws attention to his slip : "Orin ! You're talking as if he were—alive !" Superficially, Orin makes a mistake ; in reality his slip draws attention to a basic truth ; that the father is alive in all their minds and that he is still being coddled by Lavinia, who sees it as her duty to revenge him.

Lavinia's Slip of the Tongue

The most profound and dramatically effective example of the *lapsus linguae* occurs in the final act of the play. Throughout the act Lavinia is under an extraordinary emotional and moral pressure. Not only does she feel that she has driven her brother to suicide ; she is informed by Hazel that she will ruin Peter's life if she marries him. When Peter arrives she is torn between her feeling that she should leave him alone and her desire to escape with him, at least for some time, from the Mannon dead. Her hysterical flow of words expresses her inner tension and her attempt to clung to the sound and healthy Peter at any cost ; this constitutes her more or less conscious attitude. But as her senses are stirred she begins to identify Peter with Adam Brant, she kisses him with desperate passion and says : "Kiss me ! Hold me close ! Want me ! Want me so much you'd murder anyone to have me ! I did that—for you ! Take me in this house of the dead and love me ! Our love will drive the dead away ! It will shame them back into death !" The passage is deeply ironical. While expressing the belief that she and Peter will be able to lay the dead to rest, Lavinia revives them by demanding the same from him that Christine and Adam demanded from one another ; the conscious attempt is thwarted by an upsurge of unconscious desires. As though by natural association, the reference to "the dead" is followed by the fatal slip. At the topmost pitch of desperate, frantic abandonment, Lavinia says : "Want me ! Take me Adam !" She is brought back to herself with a start by this name escaping her. Then bewilderedly and laughing idiotically, she says : "Adam ? Why did I call you Adam ? I never even heard that name before—outside the Bible !" Then she utters with a hopeless, dead finality : "Always the dead between ! It's no good trying any more !"

The Slip as Climax

The slip comes as a climax not only at the end of the crescendo speech in which it occurs but also at the end of the final part of the trilogy. Through nine acts we have witnessed Lavinia's love for Adam Brant, implied already in Part II. We have seen follow him to the "Blessed Isles", dressed in the green he relished, finds

substitutes for him. But Lavinia herself has never realised the significance of these actions. She has always repressed her love for Adam, because the puritan Mannon part of hers demands that she had Adam killed not out of jealousy—as is the case—but out of justice ; once she admits to herself that she loved him, she must accept the painful consequence of this admission : that her retribution has not been that of divine justice but of selfish desire. This is why it is so necessary for Lavinia to repress her love for Adam. The revelation comes in the form of a slip which, as O'Neill is anxious to make clear, means a great surprise to her. She is depicted as a victim of an unconscious passion, of an illusion ; and her tragic stature lies in the fact that although she might have claimed in her defence that her crimes were founded on an illusion she could not be held responsible for, she does not do so ; on the contrary, she is ready to punish herself even more severely than she had punished the other Mannons.

Lavinia's Longing For Sinlessness

Although O'Neill motivates Lavinia's slip by building a speech which contains a logical, associative line of thought ("the dead"—"Adam") and by throwing Lavinia into a despair bordering on insanity, a state of mind which would naturally release her repressed desires, the slip holds true primarily on a deeper, symbolic level. Lavinia's reference to the Biblical archetype indicates that Adam Brant himself relates in Part I how he has lived on the "Blessed Isles" in a "Garden of Paradise before sin was discovered". With her deeply-rooted puritan sense of sin, increased recently after the death of Orin, there is nothing Lavinia longs for more intensely than sinlessness she still enjoyed when she first met Adam and which was most seriously violated when she had him, whom she really loved, killed. Her slip is a manifestation of a deep, repressed need, not only for love but also for purity, for the Adam of the "Blessed Isles".

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Characterization in Mourning Becomes Electra

Thematic Characterization

O'Neill experimented with different techniques of characterization in different plays. He was a restless experimenter and he tried to invent dramatic techniques that could faithfully project his vision of life. His art of characterization, therefore, depends upon what kind of theme he is handling in a particular play. It is the theme that primarily dictates the style of characterization. Since in *Mourning Becomes Electra* his theme is concerned with evil, death, war, puritanism, freedom and love etc , he resorts to a technique of characterization that brings out the hidden force of these powerful concepts. His characterization, therefore, is fundamentally thematic and meant to help in understanding the central idea of the play more clearly and easily.

Quintessential Selves

In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, which O'Neili patterned on Greek tragedy, he was determined to reduce his story to its barest outlines and characters to their quintessential selves, either divining or having read in Aristotle that in tragedy "character comes in as subsidiary to the action", since the "incidents and the plot are the end of tragedy ; and the end is the chief thing of all" Precisely as in *The Great God Brown* he had avoided showing us the individual peculiarities of facial expression through the use of masks, and in *Strange Interlude* and *Dynamo* resorted to the aside and the soliloquy because he wanted to get at the mental processes of his people without making every speech seem "natural", so in *Mourning Becomes Electra* he used a ready-made story into all the details and motives and reasons of which it was not necessary to go. If he had lived in Elizabethan England, he would probably have gone over to the Bankside and written plays in blank verse.

Victims of Evil

O'Neill's characters in *Mourning Becomes Electra*, particularly those belonging to the Mannon clan, are victims of evil. To stress

this point, O'Neill has focused his attention on the character of Lavinia. Lavinia, the product of those very forces in her family which precipitated its peculiar and inevitable fate, discovers that she has at last become like her own mother, that in demanding payment for sin that grew out of lust and hatred she herself is inevitably drawn to her own brother and even to the naked savages, now that her father, toward whom she was also drawn by forces not exactly filial, is no longer alive. All her natural instincts, thwarted by a maniacal desire for vengeance, have turned in upon her. This is her fate, and she marches to a doom which is actually inescapable, from which no god-from-the-machine, no benign court, no accommodating dramatist, is able to save her. For such victims of the evil that seems inherent in life there is no salvation.

Symbolic Device

Instead of using masks to show what has happened to Orin and Lavinia, O'Neill simply states in his stage directions that they have come to resemble their parents, a bit of symbolism more strikingly dramatic than he could have achieved if he had actually made the actors put on masks. "I'm now", says Orin, "in Father's place and you're Mother......That's the evil destiny out of the past I haven't dared predict ! I'm the Mannon you're chained to !" Out of the mouth of this demented man has come the ultimate truth. Like the inspired Cassandra, he perceives through his disordered mind the meaning of the curse.

Mannons as Mankind

The Mannon mansion is infected by the taint of mortality, representing in a way the fate of mankind. As Seth, the hired hand, says in the first scene of *The Haunted* : "There's been evil in that house since it was first built in hate-and it's kept growin' there ever since, as what's happened there has proved." There is in the trilogy the usual hint, in the imagination of a woman, that some kind of evil and implacable deity is behind it all. This notion is given to Christine Mannon in Act I of *The Hunted* in a dialogue with Hazel, the 'nice' young lady of the play. Christine too had once been innocent and loving and trusting, like Hazel, but "god won't leave us alone" ; He tortures and wrings and twists human lives with "Others' lives until—we poison each other to death !" But, as in most of O'Neill's tragedies, no exact balance is ever struck between fate and free will. And the men, on their part, think, simply, that a Mannon is a Mannon and this signifies death. Thus Orin sets out to write a history of the Mannon family in order to trace out to its secret hiding place the evil destiny that has dominated the Mannon family. He finds no answer and can only make the observation to Lavinia that he finds her the "most

interesting criminal" of them all. And he concludes too that the Mannons are not special in any way but are only mankind writ large. He thus takes himself, prematurely aged, guilt ridden, sitting in a dark room and writing about sin and death by a dim lamp, to be a symbol of man's fate—"a lamp burning out in a room of waiting shadows !"

Psychological Motivation and Complexes

In *Mourning Becomes Electra* O'Neill appears to have made the psychological motivation too explicit and on much too a neat pattern. And although this motivation has seemed Freudian, it has exaggerated to the point of incredibility the fatal necessity of the Oedipus and Electra complexes. It has described the sinful love of the son for the mother and of the daughter for the father as a universal, compulsive pattern. These protagonists seem to have been born damned. Except for Electra, they do not achieve tragedy ; they become merely the helpless victims of their inherited natures. And this psychological equivalent of original sin, which motivates the action of the play but destroys the conviction of its tragedy, is further explained intellectually by references to the New England puritanism of the Mannons. But clinical psychology and puritanism remain abstractions ; they do not produce the dramatic illusion of reality.

"Chorus" Characters

O'Neill seems to have been aware of this difficulty, and he attempted to meet it by introducing a "Chorus" of "townsfolk...as a human background for the drama of the Mannons." Contrasting with the inhuman Mannons, he introduced these "types, together with two individual "normal" characters, Peter and Hazel Niles. This brother and sister are described as in love with Lavinia and Orin Mannon, but they seem so innocent as to be unreal. They woodenly persist in their love for the Mannons, despite repeated rejections, insults and desertions. And their total unreality makes the unrelieved depravity of the Mannons seem all the more incredible. A true Inferno must establish some dramatic relationship with the work-a-day world. But only Seth Beckwith, the caretaker for the Mannons, successfully relates them to the world of the living.

Psychoanalytic Approach

O'Neill relentlessly analyzes the lives of five persons at the centre of his drama. While Peter, Hazel and the townspeople are deliberately characterized by purely external means, and Seth is left on the edges of the action, Lavinia, Christine, Orin, Ezra and Adam are placed in a crucible. They are concerned with nothing but

themselves, and even that concern is limited to the psycho-sexual problems which they all fatally share. The psychoanalytic approach makes such concentration possible, perhaps inevitable, and it is extraordinary that a play of this length, with so small a cast and so little variety of subject matter, can hold an audience for the length of such remorseless investigation. That it works is because, with the psychoanalytic lead, O'Neill provides an essentially *purgative* action. Whereas nothing happened to Nina Leeds (in *Strange Interlude*), much happens to the Mannons. They discover, they grow, and they change, and what happens to them is therapeutic as psychoanalysis is therapeutic.

Exchange of Roles

Characters in O'Neill's plays often exchange roles at different points in the drama. This is particularly true of *Strange Interlude* and *Mourning Becomes Electra.* After Christine has killed herself and Lavinia becomes a fully developed woman, she takes Christine's place in the play as a whole, but especially for Orin who was so close to his mother. Adam Brant includes the identity of Marie Brantome and takes her place from the beginning of the play, thus continuing her dramatic impact, even after her death, upon the Mannon family. When Lavinia returns with Orin from clipper ship in the fifth act of *The Hunted,* she represents all the Mannon harshness, stiffness, and formal 'justice'. At that point, before her dramatic change in the last play, she has completely taken the place of Ezra. When Lavinia becomes feminine, and in the process "becomes" Christine, there is no one left to play Ezra, and to fill this character vacuum Orin becomes more and more like his father, obsessed with the idea of a special doom reserved for all the Mannons. We learn that in the South Seas he had been jealous of Lavinia's interest in other men, in exactly the same way that Ezra was jealous of Christine. What is in fact happening at this point in the play is that Orin and Lavinia are reliving their parents' marriage and tragedy. Once Orin is dead, Lavinia loses her identification with Christine and once again assumes the stiff, repressed, and dead attitudes of a Mannon.

Basic Types

Characters substitute for each other in *Mourning Becomes Electra* because in spite of separate identities there are only two basic characters, the repressed, moralistic man dominated by a will to death, and the voluptuous, exotic, and sensual woman, dominated by a will to life through sex. All the characters in this play are variants of these two basic types. Character substitution, then is the strongest support for the idea that the play is dominated by the basic polarities or dualities of life, and that these have to be resolved before the play can end.

Guilty Characters

The main burden of guilt in the play is borne by the male characters, despite the fact that Christine and Lavinia are more directly responsible for violence and death. Guilt is inevitably bound up with being born a man, for men grow up to be fathers Fathers inevitably commit crimes against the women, both as wives and mothers. Men are by nature clumsy in expressing love, while women are, in themselves, love's living expression. The men in the play regard women as goddesses, possessing the secret of happiness and peace, which can only be won by a man if he possesses the woman. Yet in possessing a woman, they destroy her capacity to love, and for this "murder" they must be punished. Their guilt is due to treason against the life-giving, love-affirming force represented by the female. The older men in the Mannon family are all guilty of loving Marie Brantome, Adam Brant's mother selfishly and destructively. Ezra Mannon is guilty of letting Marie die unaided, and he repeats this crime when he kills Christine's love for him during their marriage. Lavinia, while she is still part of the father force and not a woman herself, is guilty of helping Ezra tear Orin from his mother to go to war. The mother is left bereaved and alone, through the fault of others, and she is not to be judged harshly for taking another "son-lover" in her desperate need. Orin wishes to be faithful to all that his mother represents, but his male, Mannon heritage, plus the masculine heritage of war, overcomes him. He is guilty, like the other Mannon men, of desiring to possess and thus to destroy the mother and love itself. He results Lavinia's effort to love and die fully, just as he did Christine's. His guilt lies in his rejection of love and embrace of death.

Not Fully Rounded

The characters in *Mourning Becomes Electra* are not fully rounded. Because they are respresentatives of basic character types, which in turn are based upon the most elemental patterns of terrestrial life, they are dominated by a single motive, a single desire, and a single destiny They are totally unlike, for example, the characters of Shakespeare, which are infinitely various. When Shakespeare created a character he did not look beyond the thing itself, except, perhaps, in his last plays, and even in those the matter is open to debate. Shakespeare gave us separate beings, diverse in their natures as people in reality are. That is because, to use Aristotelian language, he gave us true imitations of action, true imitations of life. O'Neill did not give us imitations of life, but rather projected upon life his intuition, often weird, often primitive, but always profound, of the underlying patterns of life.

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Major Characters in Mourning Becomes Electra

(1) EZRA MANNON

A Disillusioned Lover

Ezra Mannon enjoyed the spontaneity of love before he married Christine. When he courted her, her eyes communicated the feelings of her heart and his heart could talk to her heart. But after a few years of their married life their relations were reduced to mere animality. This disgusted him like anything. He says to his wife: "Your body? What are bodies to me? I have seen too many rotting in the sun to make grass greener. Ashes to ashes, dirt to dirt! Is that your notion of love?"

Symbol of the Sublimation of Sex

Frustration in marital life sublimated his sexual energy. He joined the Mexican war and rose to the rank of a major. In the meantime, his father died and he had to leave the army and then he took to business—he started taking interest in shipping as a profession. But the agony of his life still gnawed at his heart; his restlessness drove him to seek some other avenues of satisfaction and he studied law and became a judge. Then he took part in politics and became mayor. Meanwhile, the Civil War broke out and he joined the army again where he rose to be a Brigadier-General. During all these years he had bitter experiences of marital relations. Before he joined the army during the Mexican war he felt that Christine wanted him to go because she hated him, and that is why he did go. He hoped to be killed in action and thought that perhaps Christine also hoped so. When he came back home he found that Christine had turned to Orin and therefore he turned to Lavinia but because Lavinia was not his wife, he made up his mind to engage himself in worldly affairs and leave Christine alone. That

is why he preferred to become a judge and later on a mayor. People called him an "able" man but he felt that he was not able to get what he wanted most in his life—the love of his wife. He was not even able to keep his mind from thinking of what he had lost.

His Troubled Mind

But while he was on the front the memory of his wife troubled his mind. He lay awake in the nights thinking about his life and his wife's. In the middle of battle he thought he would be dead in a minute. But his life ending just within a minute did not appear worth a thought one way or another. Moreover, the idea of his being killed as the husband of Christine seemed to be queer and wrong, like something dying that had never lived. The idea that all the years they had been husband and wife would rise up in his mind and he would try to look back to those years. But nothing was clear except that there had been some barrier between them—a wall that was but he could never discover.

A Typical Puritan

His experience of death and life on the front shows that he is a typical puritan. When he saw death around him in the war he thought about the importance of emotional communication between husband and wife. "It was seeing death all the time in this war got me to thinking these things", he says to his wife. Death was so common there that it did not mean anything. That freed him to think of life, that is, death made him think of life. Before that life had only made him think of death. He is quite explicit in tracing this trait in his personality. "That's always been the Mannons' way of thinking", he says. In other words, he has inherited this perverted way of looking at life from his puritan ancestors. He further says that the Mannons went to the white meeting-house on Sabbaths and meditated on death. Life was a dying. Being born was starting to die. Death was being born. But that white meeting-house stuck in his mind as a temple of death. However, in the war he saw many white walls splattered with blood that counted no more than dirty water. He saw dead men scattered about, no more important than rubbish to be got rid of. That made the white meeting-house seem meaningless—making so much fuss over death.

The Other Ezra Mannon

The above traits of Ezra's personality are based on what he says to his wife about his past life. But the Ezra we see in the play is a tall, spare, big-boned man of fifty, dressed in the uniform of a Brigadier-General. His movements are exact and wooden and he has a mannerism of standing and sitting in stiff, posed attitudes that

suggests the statues of military heroes. When he speaks, his deep voice has a hollow repressed quality, as if he were continuously withholding emotion from it. He has a brusque and authoritative air.

The Voice of Ezra's Heart

The first voice of Ezra's heart that we hear after his arrival is his admiration of Christine's beauty that betokens his ever-burning flame of love for her. He regrets that he has offended her feelings by referring to Adam Brant and kisses her hand impulsively. He tells her that he has been dreaming of coming home and seeing Christine. He leans towards her though his voice trembles with desire and a feeling of strangeness and awe, and touches her hair with an awkward caress, and says: "You're beautiful. You look more beautiful than ever." He does so in spite of the fact that he feels that she has grown "strange".

Ezra's Jealousy

He cannot allow his wife to love a man of her choice and that is why Christine says that he considers her as his property. Though he dismisses the issue of Christine's relations with Adam after the latter convinces him, he still intuitively feels that Christine is not really his. "I shouldn't have bothered you with that foolishness about Brant tonight", he says, and forces a strained smile. Then he says, "I was jealous a mite, to tell you the truth." He leans over her awkwardly, as if to kiss her, then is stopped by some strangeness he feels about her still face. He feels that he cannot get used to home because it is too lonely. In the army camps he felt protected in the midst of thousand men but here when Christine has closed her eyes he feels utterly lonely. He wants to bare his heart before her, to explain something inside him—it is no doubt his distrust that has made him so uneasy. But something queer in him keeps him mum about the things he would like to show, something keeps him sitting numb in his own heart – like a statue of a dead man in a town square. He feels that his house is not his house, his bed is not his bed – they are empty, waiting for someone to move in. His wife does not seem to be his wife ; she seems to be waiting for something, for his death. And when Christine tells him that she loves Adam, he is seized with fury and threatens to kill her, but he becomes a victim of his own jealousy—he has a fit of his heart trouble. One may presume that even if Christine had not poisoned him, his ordinary heart trouble would have turned into a severe heart attack.

(2) CHRISTINE MANNON

Her Physical Features

Christine, the wife of Ezra Mannon, is a tall striking-looking woman of forty but she appears younger. She has a fine, voluptuous

figure and she moves with a flowing animal grace. She wears a green satin, smartly cut and expensive, which brings out the peculiar colour of her thick curly hair, partly a copper brown, partly a bronze gold, each shade distinct and yet blending with the other. Her face is unusual, handsome rather than beautiful. One is struck at once by the strange impression it gives in repose of being not living flesh but a wonderfully life-like pale mask, in which only the deep-set eyes, of a dark violet blue, are alive. Her black eyebrows meet in a pronounced straight line above her strong nose. Her chin is heavy, her mouth large and sensual, the lower lip full, the upper a thin bow, shadowed by a line of hair.

People have queer notions about her. Louisa says that people hate her, that she is not 'the Mannon kind', that she is foreign-looking and queer. Ames says that she is secret looking, characteristic of the Mannons who do not want people to guess their secrets.

An Enemy of Puritanism

Christine is the anti-thesis of puritanism. She hates puritans so much that when she finds Lavinia on the steps of the house on a moonlit night, she says sarcastically : "What are you moongazing at ? Puritan maidens shouldn't peer too inquisitively into Spring. Isn't beauty an abomination and love a vile thing ?" She is so much in love with life that seeks beauty in things associated with death. She wants to 'brighten' the tomb-like Mannon house which appears to her more like a sepulchre. She again takes an opportunity of attacking puritanism : "Every time I come back after being away it (the house) appears more like a sepulchre ! The "whited" one of the Bible—pagan temple front stuck like a mask on Puritan gray ugliness."

A Frustrated Wife

The greatest agony in Christine's life is that she is the wife of a man she hates. She narrates to Lavinia her tragic tale of romance and married life. She says that she loved Ezra before they were married. Then he was "handsome in his lieutenant uniform" ; he was silent and mysterious and romantic. But marriage soon turned his romance into disgust. Thus though they have lived as husband and wife for over twenty years, their relationship, she says, has no meaning "between them". She has been only giving her body to her husband—this is what she has experienced as a wife.

Her Longing For Love

When Orin was born, Christine thought he was her child and so she loved him. But Ezra and Lavinia insisted on Orin's joining

the army. And when Orin's love was also snatched from her, Christine had nothing in her life except hate and desire to be revenged, and a longing to be loved. It was then that she met Adam and she felt that he loved her. She reciprocated his love knowing his parentage and his evil design.

Murder For Love

When Ezra comes home and puts direct questions to Christine about Adam she lies to him and says that the Captain has been coming for Lavinia. She poses to love her husband but her gestures and behaviour show her hatred of her husband. When Ezra caresses her hair and admires it, she starts with repulsion and shrinks from him. Then as he turns away, she pretends to be feeling nervous. When Ezra tells her the agonizing tale of his woeful life as he experienced on the front, she says that she does not understand what he is talking about. At a stage Ezra expresses his apprehension that she is waiting for his death ; then she bursts out with anger and hatred in her voice, "You acted as if I were your wife—your property—not so long ago." But Ezra goes on nagging her and ultimately Christine confesses that she loves Adam whom she finds gentle and tender—everything Ezra has never been. He is everything what she has longed for all these years with Ezra—a lover. For Ezra this is a bolt from the blue, a naked truth which he cannot bear. He has a fit of heart trouble and Christine, who knows that this trouble is not so serious as to take his life, administers the poisonous pellet on him sent by Adam for this purpose. For the sake of her love she can obliterate all scruples from her conscience.

No Moral Scruples

Christine has no consideration for the respect and dignity of the Mannons : when Lavinia says that she will tell her father the whole story of Christine's affairs with Adam, she says that in that case she will go away with her lover : "Suppose I go off openly with Adam. Where will you and your father and the family name be after that scandal ? And what if I were disgraced myself ? I'd have the man I love, at least !" She does not feel any moral scruples in making her own daughter flirt with Adam, as she says, so that Lavinia may not grow suspicious of her mother's relations with the Captain. She tells Adam that she has made one blunder after another. "It's as if love drove me on to do everything I shouldn't", she says. Yet she cannot endanger Adam's life for her sake. Adam intends to kill Ezra in a duel but she tells him that he cannot force Ezra to fight a duel with him and points out that duelling being illegal, Ezra would have Adam arrested. She does not care for the future of her own son and daughter and is ready to desert them and join Adam in matrimony and take her share of the Mannon

estate. When she fears that Lavinia would report to the police that she (Christine) has poisoned Ezra, she entreats Orin to stop Lavinia from doing so because Adam would also be tried as her accomplice. She takes the whole responsibility on her shoulder and tries to save the life of her lover. Staring at the portrait of Ezra in his study, she appeals to him distractedly, "Ezra. Don't let her harm Adam ! I am the only guilty one ! Don't let Orin—!" And when she fears that Orin would kill Adam she risks her life and goes to Boston to warn Adam of Orin.

Martyr to Love

After killing Adam Orin comes home and tries to console his mother by his affection. He castigates her for loving a "servant's bastard" who got her under his influence to take his mother's revenge on Ezra. But he finds that she is still under the influence of her lover. He, therefore, seeks her forgiveness and begs for her love. But she is silent all the time. Lavinia holds that Adam has paid the just penalty for his crime and suggests that Christine can "live". This last word stings her like anything. She glares at Lavinia as if this were the last insult ; she utters with strident mockery : "Live !" and bursts into shrill laughter, stops abruptly, raises her hands between her face and Lavinia and pushes them out in a gesture of blotting her daughter forever from her sight. And, after a few moments, she blots herself from this world—she shoots herself.

(3) ORIN MANNON

His Physical Features

When Orin is introduced to us we are told that one is struck by his startling family resemblance to his father and Adam. There is the same lifelike mask quality of his face in repose, the same aquiline nose, heavy eyebrows, swarthy complexion, thick straight black hair, light hazel eyes. His mouth and chin have the same general characteristics as his father's had, but the expression of his mouth gives an impression of tense oversensitiveness quite foreign to the General's, and his chin is a refined, weakened version of the dead man's. He is about the same height as his father and Adam, but his body is thin and his swarthy complexion sallow. He wears a bandage around his head high up on his forehead. He carries himself by turns with a marked slouchiness or with a self conscious square-shouldered stiffness that indicates that a soldierly bearing is unnatural to him. When he speaks it is jerkily, with a strange vague, preoccupied air. But when he smiles naturally his face has a gentle boyish charm which makes women immediately want to mother him. He wears a moustache similar to Adam's which serves to increase their

resemblance to each other. Although he is only twenty, he looks thirty. He is dressed in a baggy, ill-fitting uniform—that of a first lieutenant of infantry in the Union Army.

War-Torn Anti-Hero

Orin is badly scared by war which finishes life within a few moments. For those who have no experience of war death might be something very serious, he says, but for him who has seen the naked dance of death it is only a joke—"a dirty joke life plays on life". Lavinia says to him that their father proudly told her that Orin had done one of the bravest things the General had seen in the war. Then Orin grins with bitter mockery and says that it was all absurd. Then he tells her "the joke" about his heroic deed. It really happened one night when he sneaked through the enemy's lines. He was always volunteering for extra danger but he was so scared that anyone would guess he was afraid. There was a thick mist and it was so still one could hear the fog seeping into the ground. He met a Reb crawling towards his lines ; the face of the Reb drifted out of the mist towards him. He shortened his sword and let him have the point under the ear. The Reb stared at him with an idiotic look as if he'd sat on a tack—and his eyes dimmed and went out. He had to kill another in the same way. But what was his impression of this act of 'bravery' ? It was like murdering the same man twice. He had a queer feeling that war meant murdering the same man over and over, and that in the end he would discover that the man was he himself. Their faces keep coming back in his dreams—and they change to his father's—or to his.

Victim of Oedipus Complex

Through Christine we learn that when Orin was born she turned to him because her relations with her husband were too disgusting. But her dream of the love of her son also fizzled out when Lavinia and Ezra rather forced him to join army. The dramatist does not manage to tell us Orin's response to his mother's coddling in his childhood and adolescence but when he gets wound in his head in the war he always remembers her, as if she were with him. He has most wonderful dreams about her. He imagines that he is on South Sea Islands which mean everything that is not war, everything that is peace and warmth and security. He dreams that he is there along with his mother. The breaking of the waves is her voice, the sky's colour is the same as her eyes's, the warm sand is like her skin—the whole Island is she. Now when he has come back home he is adoring her beauty : "You're more beautiful than ever ! You're younger, too, somehow." He affectionately says to her, "Of course, Mother ! You come before everything !" When Christine suggests that he should marry Hazel, he says in a complaining voice, "But now you're a widow, I'm not home an hour

before you're trying to marry me off! You must be damned anxious to get rid of me again! Why?"

His Infatuation With His Mother

In spite of the fact that Orin loves his mother so much, he cannot forgive her if he is convinced that she is really in love with Adam. How can he put up with a rival of his mother's love? His fondness for her becomes a sort of infatuation. "And I'll never leave you again now", he says to his mother, "I don't want Hazel or anyone." Then again he says with a grin, "You're my only girl!" He recalls to her how his father was always antagonistic to him in his childhood: "And what a row there was when Father caught me! And do you remember how you used to let me brush your hair and how I loved to. He hated me doing that, too" He has a strong desire to live with his mother alone after marrying Lavinia off to Peter. He tells Lavinia that Christine means thousand times more than his father meant to him. At a time he seems to be so much blind in his love for her that he cannot believe Lavinia's report against her. But when he gets certain proof of her bad conduct, he becomes furious to the extent that he resolves to kill her lover: "I'm not anxious to be hanged—for that skunk!...I heard her asking him to kiss her! I heard her warn him against me!" And he eventually kills Adam. When he looks at the face of Adam lying dead before him, it appears to be like his and he feels as if he has killed himself. In Freudian terms, he has killed the lover of his mother who he himself is. However, he has not been able to free himself from his mother-fixation even after knowing Christine's relations with Adam. He still craves for his long cherished desire to live alone with her Finding her moaning in the memory of Adam, he says to her: "Mother! Don't moan like that! You're still under his influence! But you'll forget him! I'll make you forget him! I'll make you happy! We'll leave Vinnie here and go away on a long voyage—to the South Sea—."

A Nervous Wreck

After the death of Christine Orin becomes a nervous wreck. He is incessantly obsessed by the idea that he drove his mother to commit suicide. Lavinia fears that he may confess that he is responsible for Christine's death. Due to this fear Lavinia takes him to his ideal Island, to China, but nothing attracts or diverts his mind from his guilt-consciousness. His romantically idealized Islands make him sick and the naked women dancing to the rhythm of life's spontaneity disgust him. Not only this, he misjudges that Lavinia has fallen in love with one of the natives and lusts with him and so he hastens back home, saying that he would like to face his ghosts and rid himself of his guilt-obsession. But what happens to him here is that his obsession becomes too horrible. He goes to the study feeling that

Christine must be waiting for him there, but finding none there, he cries in despair, "She isn't anywhere", and pointing towards the portraits of the Mannons, he says that they are everywhere. He is horrified by the idea that Christine could not forgive his guilt. He cannot face God's light—the natural light of the sun—when he is writing the history of the Mannons, particularly their crimes. He locks himself in his father's study in daytime and closes the blinds and lights the lamp. He finds artificial light more appropriate for his work, man's light, man's feeble striving to understand himself, to exist for himself in the darkness. It is a symbol of his life—a lamp burning out in a room of waiting shadows.

A Perverted Lover

Orin's attitude towards his beloved, Hazel, is ambivalent. On the one hand, he complains to Lavinia that she does not leave him alone with Hazel for more than a minute, even when they are engaged. But a few seconds later he says that he is afraid of being too long with her—afraid of himself. "I have no right in the same world with her", he says, "and yet I feel so drawn to her purity. Her love for me makes me appear less vile to myself." But in another breath he reverses his idea : "And, at the same time, a million times more vile, that's the hell of it. So I'm afraid you can't hope to get rid of me through Hazel." In his opinion, Hazel is, like Christine, another lost Island. He requests Lavinia to keep Hazel away from him because, he says, when he sees love for a murderer in her eyes his guilt crowds up in his throat like poisonous vomit and he longs to spit it out and confess. He cannot think that if Hazel knows the nature of his agony she may share the burden of his soul and help gain reprieve.

The Incestuous Cycle

Just as Orin's puritan possessiveness combined with Lavinia's jealousy is responsible for Christine's tragic end, it is Orin's looking at Lavinia as his mother-substitute that is responsible for the wreck of her love affairs with Peter. While they were in China he grew jealous of Lavinia's happy life there. Then how can he see her loving and living happily here when he feels that she is his accomplice ? He cannot bear the idea that Lavinia should leave him and join Peter in matrimony. He says that he has written in the history of the Mannons the crime of Lavinia and does everything to prejudice Peter against her—he does not hesitate to mention his idea about Lavinia's 'lusting' with the native. His every gesture from now onward verges on incestuous advance : "I love you now with all the guilt in me—the guilt we share ! Perhaps I love you too much, Vinnie !" Now Lavinia ceases to be his mother in his eyes ; she rather becomes some stranger with the same beautiful hair as his mother's ; she looks like Marie Brantome !

Here he becomes another Abe Mannon and Lavinia a new Marie Brantome.

His Guilt-Obsession

In spite of his efforts to force Lavinia to confess their guilt and pay penalty for it, Orin finds her "harder to break" than him. Lavinia, who was so affectionate towards her only young brother, curses him like anything : "I hate you ! I wish you were dead ! You're too vile to live ! You'd kill yourself if you weren't a coward !" These words work their influence on him like wild fire ; "You want to drive me to suicide as I drove Mother ! he says to Lavinia. He further says, "That would be justice—now you are Mother ! She is speaking now through you !...... Yes ! It's the way to peace—to find her again—my lost Island—Death is an Island of Peace, too—Mother will be waiting for me there—." And he ultimately joins his mother in death.

(4) LAVINIA MANNON

Her Picturesque Personality

Lavinia, the daughter of Ezra Mannon, is a young girl of twenty three but looks considerably older. She is tall like her mother, her body is thin, flat-breasted, and angular, and its, unattractiveness is accentuated by her plain black dress. Her movements are stiff and she carries herself with a wooden, square-shouldered, military bearing. She has a flat dry voice and a habit of snapping out her words like an officer giving orders. But in spite of dissimilarities, one is immediately struck by her facial resemblance to her mother. She has the same peculiar shade of coppergold hair, the same pallor and dark violet-blue eyes, the black eyebrows meeting in a straight line above her nose, the same sensual mouth, the same heavy jaw. Above all, one is stuck by the same strange, life-like mask impression her face gives in repose. But it is evident that Lavinia does all in her power to emphasize the dissimilarity rather than the resemblance to her mother. She wears her hair pulled tightly back, as if to conceal its natural curliness, and there is not a touch of feminine allurement to her severely plain get-up. Her head is the same size as her mother's, but on her thin body it looks too large and heavy.

Victim of Electra Complex

From the beginning of the play till the death of Ezra Mannon Lavinia remains a victim of Electra complex. In her encounter with Lavinia, Christine tells her that the former has always tried to become the wife of her father and the mother of Orin. To this

Lavinia wildly reacts, "No. It's you who have stolen all love from me since the time I was born." And when Ezra comes home from the front, Lavinia wants to snatch him from Christine. Christine wants that he should sit on the steps leading to the Mannon house and enjoy the moonlit night there but Lavinia would not like that Christine should monopolize his love. She says that it is too damp there and that because he must be hungry. he must go inside and eat something. Further, Christine suggests that Ezra should go to bed but Lavinia, who has been, watching him jealously, suddenly pulls him by the arm with a childish volubility and says, "No ! Not yet ! Please, Father ! You've only just come ! We've hardly talked at all ! She is so happy to find her father with her that she excitedly kisses him and says : You're the only man I'll ever love ! I'm going to stay with you !" When Ezra and Christine are talking together on the night of the General's 'homecoming' her heart is filled with an anguish of jealous hatred : "I hate you ! You steal even Father's love from me again ! You stole all love from me when I was born !" Then she hides her face in her hands and says almost with a sob, "Oh, Mother. Why have you done this to me ? What harm had I done you ?"

She has so much fascination for her father that she, in the beginning of the play, says that she does not know anything about love nor does she want to know anything about it and that she hates love, though we know that she loves Peter and, moreover, her love is not an ordinary fanciful romance, as we see later on. But her love for her father whose wife has proved to be unfaithful has disgusted her so much that she says that she cannot marry anyone because her father 'needs' her.

Puritan Moralist

Lavinia is a puritan moralist in her attitude towards Christine and Adam. She considers that it is immoral on the part of her mother to be unfaithful to her husband and have illicit relations with Adam. For knowing the whole truth about Adam's relations with her mother, Lavinia follows her to New York and when she has seen with her own eyes her mother and Adam making love, she make sup her mind to chastise her mother and punish Adam. After her return home from New York she bursts upon Christine ; "You vile—! You're shameless and evil ! Even if you are my mother, I say it !" For her mother's vileness, Lavinia wants to punish her strongly.

She hates Adam on two counts. First, because she considers that he is the son of a low nurse and second, because Adam, she believes, does not really love Christine sincerely but that Christine is "his revenge on Father".

Her Possessiveness

On the one hand Lavinia complains that her mother stole all her love from her and on the other hand she tries to exercise her authority on Orin since the moment he arrives home. "All I want to do is warn you to be on your guard." She warns him against her own mother : "Don't let her baby you the way she used to and get you under her thumb again. Don't believe the lies she'll tell you ! Wait until you've talked to me !" On another occasion she fears that Orin is still begging his mother's love, even when he knows the whole tale of her illicit connection with Adam. Then with bitter scorn Lavinia says ; "Orin ! After all that's happened, are you becoming her crybaby again ?" Orin starts and gets to his feet, staring at her confusedly, as if he had forgotten her existence. Lavinia speaks again in curt commanding tone that recalls her father "Leave her alone ! Go in the house...Do you hear me ? March !" She does not allow Hazel to take Orin along with her to her house.

Her Vindictive Nature

When Christine confesses to Lavinia that she loves Adam, Lavinia says : "You know you deserve the worst punishment you could get...And I'd like to see you punished for your wickedness." All this does not show that Lavinia wants to do justice to her mother but that being jealous of her mother since her early childhood it is her vindictive nature that had matured with the advance of her age. Though in the following words she is telling Christine what Ezra would do if he comes to know that his wife is an adulteress, yet they voice Lavinia's feeling of revenge : "Father would use all his influence and get Brant blacklisted so he'd lose his command and never get another ! You know how much the "Flying Trades" means to him. And Father would never divorce you. You could never marry. You'd be an anchor around his neck. Don't forget you're five years older than he is ! He'll still be in his prime when you're an old woman with all your looks gone ! He'd grow to hate the sight of you !" And it is due to her insinuation that Orin kills her lover and drives her to commit suicide. Her words on this occasion remarkably reflect her nature : "You and I, who are innocent, would suffer a worse punishment than the guilty—for we'd have to live on ! It would mean that Father's memory and that of all the honorable Mannon dead would be dragged through the horror of a murder trial ! But I'd rather suffer that than let the murder of our father go unpunished !"

An Ardent Lover

Though in the beginning of the play we hear Lavinia say that she hates love, when the actual moment of her relations with Peter comes she proves to be an ardent lover. Adam had been on the

Islands all alone without any real feeling of love for someone alive in this world ! Orin only dreamt of being there ; and Christine always craved to go there along with Adam. But Lavinia, who has the blessings of Peter's love in her life, goes on the Islands and falls in love with them. The Islands finish setting her free. There is something mysterious and beautiful there—a good spirit—of love—coming out of the land and sea. It makes her forget death. She feels there is no hereafter but this world only—the warm earth in the moonlight, the trade wind in the coco palms—the surf on the reef, the fires at night and the drum throbbing in her heart, the natives dancing naked and innocent without knowledge of sin. She has the moments of rapture in her life when Peter is in her arms : "Oh, Peter, hold me close to you. I want to feel love ! Love is all beautiful !" On another occasion she says : "Hold me close, Peter ! Nothing matters but love, does it ? That must come first ! No price is too great, is it ? Or for peace ..I love everything that grows simply—up toward the sun—everything that's straight and strong !"

A Different Mannon

Being deprived of the last straw of hope in her life in Peter, Lavinia locks herself within the haunted Mannon house. She is conscious of the fact that she is not going the way her mother and brother went because, she says, they sought to escape punishment. But she does not want to escape punishment and she, being the last Mannon, she has to punish herself. And her punishment is also queer : "Living alone here with the dead is a worse act of justice than death or prison ! I'll never go out or see anyone ! I'll have the shutters nailed closed so no sunlight can ever get in. I'll live alone with the dead, and keep their secrets, and let them hound me, until the curse is paid out and the last Mannon is let die !"

32

Minor Characters in Mourning Becomes Electra

(1) ADAM BRANT

His Physical Features

Adam Brant, the Captain of the clipper "The Flying Trades", is the son of Marie Brantome and David Mannon, the brother of Abe Mannon, Ezra Mannon's grandfather. He is a young man of thirty six whose face in repose has a peculiar quality of being a life-like mask rather than living flesh. He has a broad, low forehead, framed by coal-black straight hair which he wears noticeably long, pushed back carelessly from his forehead as a poet's might be. He has a big aquiline nose, bushy eyebrows, swarthy complexion, hazel eyes. His wide mouth is sensual and moody—a mouth that can be strong and weak by turns. He wears a moustache, but his heavy cleft chin is clean-shaven. In figure he is tall, broad-shouldered and powerful. He gives the impression of being always on the offensive or defensive, always fighting life. When he appears in the first scene of *Homecoming* he is dressed with an almost foppish extravagance, with touches of studied carelessness, as if a romantic Byronic appearance were the idea in mind. There is little of the obvious ship captain about him, except his big, strong hands and his deep voice. In the words of Pete. he is "a darned romantic-looking cuss. Looks more like a gambler or a poet than a ship captain."

Child of Deprivation

Adam has to bear the curse of being a child of poor parents. In spite of his mother's all possible effort to make a gentleman of her only son, Adam could not fulfil her wish. At seventeen he runs away to sea and forgets that he has a mother except that he takes part of her name, Brant, because he cannot wear the name of Mannon.

He forgets her and sends letters now and then and money when he has any. However, many years pass and when he comes to New York he finds her dying of sickness and starvation. It is too late for him to save her--she dies in his arms.

Enemy of the Mannons

Adam is the deadliest enemy of the Mannons because he cannot forget the treatment accorded to his parents by Abe Mannon. Abe Mannon not only turned out his father and mother but also proved to be a callous and cruel-hearted man when he did not respond to his mother's request for financial help when she was not able to earn her livelihood after the death of her husband and Adam's departure. Due to this fact he swore on his mother's dead body that he would revenge her death on the oldest Mannon alive--Ezra Mannon.

His Love and Revenge

Adam's love for Christine is a genuine love of a man for a woman—it is a byproduct of his hatred against Ezra. He tells Christine how he started making love to Christine : when he was introduced to Christine as Mrs. Ezra Mannon, he hated her being the wife of his enemy. But then he thought he would take her from Ezra and that would be part of his revenge on the General. And thus out of hatred came his love.

Romantic Adventurer

Lavinia says about Adam that being romantic is his trade. He is the first character in the play to talk about the Blessed Isles. To Lavinia he says in a mood of romantic rapture : "And they live in as near the Garden of Paradise before sin was discovered as you'll find on this earth ! Unless you've seen it, you can't picture the green beauty of their land set in the blue of the sea ! The clouds lie down on the mountain tops, the sun drowsing in your blood, and always the surf on the barrier reef singing a croon in your ears like a lullaby ! The Blessed Isles, I'd call them ! You can forget there all men's dirty dreams of greed and power !"

For consummating his romance he is willing to stake his life like a typical hero of the medieval romance. He tells Christine that when Ezra comes he will wait for the General and tell him that he loves Christine. And if Ezra tries to stop him, he would kill him. Or, he will insult Ezra in the street before everyone and make him fight him. He will let Ezra shoot him first and then kill him in self-defence.

Christine's Accomplice

Though he tries his best to devise some means to possess Christine, it is Christine whose solution to the problem is acceptable to him. She tells him her plan to kill Ezra by administering poison on him, which he is to send from Boston. In the beginning he seems to be a bit scrupulous about the cowardly trick of winning Christine by poisoning her husband but Christine drives away from his mind these "cowardly romantic scruples" and he becomes her accomplice by sending a packet of poisonous pellets which becomes the source of Ezra's death.

His Moments of Self-Realization

However, Adam has some moments of self-realization. When he learns from Christine that she has killed Ezra, and that Lavinia suspects that she has poisoned the General, he is overcome by dejection ; he says that it was not that kind of revenge he had sworn on his mother's body. He should have done as he wanted, he says, he should have fought with Ezra Mannon as two men fight for the love of a woman. Then with a bitter self-contempt he says that he has his father's rotten coward blood in him. He is so much overpowered by self-contempt that he decides to leave the sea saying that the sea hates a coward. However, his agony does not trouble him for long because Orin kills him very soon.

(2) HAZEL NILES

Her Physical Features

Hazel is the sister of Peter Niles. She is a pretty, healthy girl of nineteen, with dark hair and eyes. Her features are small but clearly modelled. She has a strong chin and a capable, smiling mouth. One gets a sure impression of her character at a glance—frank, innocent, amiable, and good—not in a negative ; but in a positive way.

As a Lover

Hazel is in love with Orin. She is very much perturbed by Orin's condition. When he is driven by his guilt-consciousness she comes to him with a proposal approved by her mother to take him with her to her house where he may stay with them for some time.

Displeased With Lavinia

But because Lavinia does not allow Orin to leave the Mannon house Hazel is displeased with her. It is this displeasure that is sreponsible for her belief that Orin did not die accidentally while he

was cleaning his pistol but that Lavinia drove him to commit suicide. Therefore she cannot allow Lavinia to marry Peter because she says that they can never be happy in their life. With this idea in her mind she tells Peter about Orin's charge against Lavinia that she lusted with Avahanni.

(3) PETER NILES

Guileless and Good

Peter Niles is a captain in the U. S. Artillery. He is very much like his sister, Hazel, in character—straightforward, guileless and good-natured. He is a heavily built young man of twenty two, awkward in movement and hesitating in speech. His face is broad, plain, with a snubby nose, curly brown hair, fine gray eyes and a big mouth. He wears the uniform of an artillery captain in the Union Army.

As a Lover

Peter has great love for Lavinia. When Lavinia says to him in utter disgust that she cannot marry him or anyone, he does not lose his heart but says that he is not giving up his hope of getting the reward of his love for Lavinia and expresses his hope that Lavinia will change her mind in time. And, of course that time comes when Lavinia is more impatient to have him than he. But he does not hesitate to quarrel with his mother and sister who talk against Lavinia.

Superstitious and Suspicious

Peter is obsessed by the feeling that the Mannon house is a haunted house. He says to Lavinia that he wants to get her away from this 'darned house' because he is beginning to feel superstitious about it. Not only this, he hates the town and everyone living there. Further, Lavinia finds in him a great change—his eyes which have always been trustful have now a hurt look, they look suspicious and afraid of life now. He is unable to understand why Lavinia is so impatient to marry him—was there anything in Orin's writings that would stop them from marrying? And when Lavinia says to him falsely that Orin was right to say that she had lusted with Avahanni he leaves her to her desperation and even though she calls him back to tell him that she has lied, he does not come back.

33

Select Literary Criticism

(1)

A Great American Playwright

The stature of Eugene O'Neill casts a long shadow on the American theater. Whether it stretches or contracts in the critical estimates of a particular period or critic, this much is certain : the height and breadth of the American theater is measured by it. Find fault with O'Neill and you find fault with the entire American stage ; find merit in him and you find worth in its striving, or straining, toward significant drama. It is possible to single out American playwrights endowed with greater refinement and facility than can be attributed to him but none who made a comparable impression on the twentieth century. Chiefly as a result of his persistent efforts after 1915, the American drama actually *entered* the century and made contributions to world theater that could be considered significantly modern.

—John Gassner

(2)

A Playwright With a Vision

O'Neill's outlook on life was no less subject to praise and blame. He was insufficiently spiritual for religious critics and too metaphysical and passive for Marxists ; and while both could deplore his pessimism, others had no difficulty in approving his huge despair as salutory defiance of facile American optimism or an existentialist truth.

—John Gassner

(3)

His Pessimism Has a Gleam of Hope

O'Neill is not concerned about man's ultimate destiny, he is not disturbed by the fact that man and all his works may some day drift into the darkness of space a frozen and unseen monument to the vagaries of the creative process. His pessimism is of man in this world in which he must live and justify himself if life is to have

a meaning. His pessimism is born of man, not of God or the universe. It is a pessimism that has in it some gleam of hope for it holds that man's greatest tragedies are of his making, and thus it is a fair presumption to hope that man may unmake them. Not that O'Neill says that he will do so ; he may recognize the persistence of man's hopeless hope 'but even granting all that, there is still a vast difference between the position of O'Neill and that of Schopenhauer.

—*Sophus Keith Winther*

(4)

A Dramatist of an Idea

Eugene O'Neill is the dramatist of an idea. Shouted, whispered, or silently assumed, one theme unites all his plays, from the earliest experiments to his last mature work. The theme is rooted in O'Neill's own personal need, and its power to shape both form and meaning in the plays is derived from this source. It represents an attempt at once to express and to assuage the lifelong torment of a mind in conflict.

O'Neill thought of himself as a writer of "ironic tragedy", but irony requires a detachment which he found impossible. Pity, indignation, despair at the human position, robbed his tragedies of the irony he intended them to convey. The sneer became only the protective mask of a face distorted by suffering, the ironic words were drowned in cries of anguish. The plays are attempts to explain human suffering and, somehow, to justify it. The result is not irony, but the classic twofold justification of the ways of God—or fate—to man : first, that suffering and the very need to explain and symbolize it are the fountain head of human action and creativity, and second, that fated though he may be, man is ultimately a free and responsible agent who brings most of his grief upon himself through pride.

—*Doris V. Falk*

(5)

Existentialistic Suggestion

O'Neill's view of the human dilemma here—and in the later plays—suggests that of Sartrian existentialism. Man's very "lostness", his need to belong, is the sky to his humanity. As soon as he has "belonged", he has abdicated his manhood, he has ceased to be an "existent" and becomes a passive, vegetative being at the mercy of forces outside himself and beyond his control. Yet all the forces which offer him a secure environment in exchange for obedience and conformity—society, the authority of religion, of the state of tradition—have been created by man himself. They have no existence of their own except by virtue of man's existence. He is in actuality therefore, free from all outside authority in the determination of his fate, but he is also the lonely bearer of a

terrifying responsibility for himself and the race. He has nothing on which to lean for support but himself, nothing to blame for his failures but himself. Human life has no intrinsic meaning or order—no harmony like that of nature—except the meaning that man projects upon it. He must create his own values and impose upon his universe whatever significance and whatever moral order he expects to adopt as a *raison d'etre* or as a basis for an ethical code. To seek asylum from this responsibility for his own destiny by accepting some established institution as an absolute is to escape from the self and from fears of its inadequacy. All man can really hope to belong to is himself. His "sickness unto death" is nct his loneliness and anxiety in making choices and bearing responsibility, but what Kierkegaard called "despair at willing to be oneself"—the despair of Yank in *The Hairy Ape*, and of a long line of protagonists in O'Neill's plays.

—*Doris V. Falk*

(6)

Seeker of Dramatic Media

Throughout his life O'Neill sought a dramatic medium with which to explore the human soul. He tried many methods, some of them as radical as anything attempted in the American theater. He found, however, that these had their limitations : they were too mechanical, called attention to themselves rather than to what they were intended to reveal, suggested demarcations that were too black and white, or forces too much outside his characters. But he did not return to the realism which was, after all, his "natural language" until he had found that with it, and the help of alcohol, he could say something better.

—*Robert F. Whitman*

(7)

An Artist Driven By Inner Necessity

It is not strange that a young and ambitious playwright, especially if he is interested in saying something about life, should concern himself with problems of technique. But many skilled playwrights, having learned to handle the tools of their trade, are content to use them over and over again. O'Neill seems, however, to have been driven by some inner necessity to devise a whole new set of tools every time he planned a new work, as though its implications and its physical shape could not be fitted into any mould he had already used.

Being in no sense a purveyor of theatrical commodities, he takes an artist's delight in facing new difficulties. An obstacle easily overcome is an obstacle scarcely worth attacking. But there is more to this than the joy of the craftsman. O'Neill is always striving to show his characters and develop his situations in the

most emphatic manner possible, to dig down as deep into thei souls as he can, and to exhibit only what he considers really important. There is no one way of doing this : "technique" for such a man is a barren and meaningless bit of jargon. "If I thought there was only one way," he said some years ago, "I should be following the mechanistic creed—which is the very thing I condemn." Each new play demands its own specially articulated structure. Surface realism suffices for one set of characters, old fashioned romance for another, and so on.

—*Barrett H. Clark*

(8)

A Protean Figure

Considered either as a dramatic architect or as a writer of dramatic prose, O'Neill is a protean figure, remarkable for his range, his daring, and his originality. Looked at casually, his plays seem to represent a bewildering display of artistic pyrotechnics, as he constantly varies both their form and their language. On closer inspection......there is going on a continuous and chartable evolution which is to culminate in plays that are remarkable for the compressed unity and explosive power of their structure and for the appropriateness and verisimilitude of their language.

—*J. H. Raleigh*

(9)

Opening of Plays Skilfully Managed

No one has ever written plays in which the problem of the beginning is managed more skilfully than in the plays of O'Neill. In the first place he was trained to the theater from childhood. He knows the stage intimately, and no problem in dramatic technique is too elementary to miss his notice. He never overestimates the interest and nature of an audience. He knows that it is important at the parting of the curtains to unify a heterogeneous group of people, restless, talking, disorganized, concentrating on as many different subjects as there are people. This psychological problem is further complicated by the movement and commotion of the latecomers, who are still pushing past people already seated in order to find a place for themselves. This situation so characteristic of the opening of any play is managed with skilful technique by O'Neill.

—*Sophus Keith Winther*

(10)

A Master of Speech

O'Neill was a master of speech in so far as the words spoken by characters concern us as coming from them. What matters on the stage is not that a speech should be elegant......unless the

character is...but that the words spoken should be discovered by the character in himself in the act of saying them. O'Neill was certainly able to make characters speak authentically at the critical points of their life experience : to do this, one must have a superior command of language even if not of the sort which could have imposed itself outside the theatre.

—Lionel Abel

(11)

Characters are Victims of Circumstances

O'Neill has made his characters the victims of circumstances over which they have no control. They move in a world of dark and sinister forces, which govern the destinies of men and women helpless and impotent before the workings of these unpredictable powers. This does not mean that his characters are weaklings whose lives are pathetic but not tragic. Just the reverse is true. It is the great character whose life becomes significant when it struggles against the inevitable. Darrell, Nina and Marsden are all rebels against the despotism of facts as these facts move slowly and inexorably to enmesh and destroy their hopes and their happiness. It is their defiant struggle against those facts that lends dignity to their lives, and it is at this point that their universality becomes apparent. Thus strife with adversity is a parallel to the life of all those who do not gracefully or supinely accept the inevitable. The development of characters in O'Neill's dramas is always typical and in a sense universal in that it is the common lot of man to feel the heavy power of those circumstances over which he has no control and against which his spirit rebels in bitterness and pain.

—Sophus Keith Winther

(12)

O'Neill and Man's Cosmic Loneliness

Man or woman is alone, staring into a mirror, wondering what he or she is......when they look into a mirror they are, of course, searching for themselves looking to see if they can see what they are.

Fearing death, shunning the light, men also suffer from a cosmic loneliness and a corresponding doubt as to who and what they are. In such a world—death, darkness and doubt—illusion is the only protection and hence O'Neill's plays, at their deepest level, are concerned, tormentedly and complexly, with the endless ambiguities of the relationship between illusion and reality. Moreover, there is no final "message" about this problem : man must, and must not, live upon illusions.

Not all of O'Neill's characters are concerned with these problems, at least not explicitly. Their common lot, however, is unhappiness. In the early plays there are a few happy, intelligent, and committed people, usually doctors and nurses......but they disappear in the major and later plays. There are also characters who are wise......but those that are, are unhappy,......Some of these wise people......try, usually unsuccessfully, to withdraw from the race (both senses meant). Withdrawn or committed they are all trapped, like George Eliot's characters, in an inexorable moral machine that hardly ever lets its transgressors escape the consequences of past misdoings. Many of them live in the past, endlessly ruminating over their sins, or paradoxically, celebrating the imagined and departed glories of this same past. Life for all of them is a "strange interlude" in which "we call on past and future to bear witness we are living".

—J. H. Raleigh

(13)

Impact of Monte Cristo

The Eugene O'Neill as a playwright was in rebellion against all that *The Count of Monte Cristo* stood for—melodrama, sentiment, easy popularity, stage tricks, cardboard characters, stale rhetoric—is all too obvious. What is not so apparent is how deeply *The Count* was stamped on his creative imagination. His father always obsessed him, and it was impossible to conceive of his father without his father's alter ego, Edmund Dantes. Like his own carving on the balustrade in the house in New London, like the green paint on the statuettes, it was all there inescapably and almost inexpugnably. If consciously he thought his inspiration derived from Nietzsche, Dostoevski, and Strindberg, which to a considerable degree it did, unconsciously he was often projecting variations on *The Count of Monte Cristo* throughout the whole first part of his creative life.

—J. H. Raleigh

(14)

O'Neill's Two Careers

As a playwright O'Neill had at least two careers. The first career, by which he gained his fame, was played under the shadow of the Chateau d'If ; the second—the one that incorporates *The Iceman Cometh, Long Day's Journey*, and the other late masterpieces—represents, among other things, *his* final escape from the dungeon in which his father lay.

—J. H. Raleigh

(15)

O'Neill's Histories

O'Neill's "histories" actually fall into four categories : the historical exotics about the distant past like *Lazarus Laughed*, *The Fountain*, or *Marco Millions* ; those about the American nineteenth century like *Desire Under the Elms* or *Mourning Becomes Electra* ; those about the "remembered" past like *The Iceman Cometh* or *Long Day's Journey* ; and finally the contemplated cycle plays about the fate and fortunes of a Yankee-Irish family in America from the eighteenth century to the twentieth century, of which only *A Touch of the Poet* survives.

—*J. H. Raleigh*

(16)

O'Neill's Relationship With Words

O'Neill's relationship with words is a curious phenomenon. That he had only "a touch of the poet" he was the first to recognize and lament....He did have a real mimetic genius for the patois and slang of American speech of the turn of the century and the Twenties of which *Hughie* is the finest example. He could do quite believable Negro, Swedish, and Irish dialects.

—*J. H. Raleigh*

(17)

O'Neill's Structural Power

His work is throughout essentially of the theatre. Each play is clear-cut and sharp in outline, solidly constructed from beginning to end ; *Anna Christie* and *The First Man* as well as the more original and striking *Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape*. The structural power and pre-eminent simplicity of these works are intensified by the use of certain technical expedients and processes which seem dear to the heart of this dramatist... for instance, the oft-used device of the repetition of a word, a situation, or a motive.

—*Hugo Von Hofmannsthal*

(18)

O'Neill's Characters Are Too Direct

Measured by this high ideal, the characters in O'Neill's plays seem to me a little too direct ; they utter the precise words demanded of them by the logic of the situation ; they seem to stand rooted in the situation where for the time being they happen to be

placed; they are not sufficiently drenched in the atmosphere of their own individual past. Paradoxically, O'Neill's characters are not sufficiently fixed in the past.

—*Hugo Von Hofmannsthal*

(19)

O'Neill's Dramatic Inventiveness

Dramatic inventiveness is O'Neill's surest claim to fame. I include in this term both the feeling for theatre which enabled him to hit upon highly effective devices for the staging of his plays, and another kind of imagination which enabled him to find situations corresponding to his various concepts of the human dilemma. The attempt to find answers to all the big questions in life produced some exquisitely painful prose in such plays as *Lazarus Laughed* and *The Fountain*, but it also determined the characteristic form of an O'Neill play.

—*Eugene M. Waith*

(20)

Beyond Surfaces

He was never content to catch the surface of a character. He must always by some means suggest what lay beneath and beyond in the character's relations to his inmost self, to his family, to society, and finally to the source of all things, whether referred to as God or Life-with-a-capital-L. The title of his first Broadway play was emblematic : *Beyond the Horizon.*

—*Eugene M. Waith*

(21)

Movement Towards Unmasking

The characteristic structure of an O'Neill play, then, is determined by a movement toward unmasking, which is often also a movement of the principal characters toward discovery of the stance they must take toward the fundamental problems of existence In many of the early plays O'Neill chose an episodic form in which he could show the stages by which, in the course of time, the final discovery was reached. Later he reduced the compass of the time to one day, though contriving to retain the same emphasis on the experience of discovery. Even this one day is a journey.

—*Eugene M. Waith*

(22)

Dramatization of Subconscious Emotions

O'Neill's philosophy reflects the period which followed the World War. This has caused him to ignore, to a remarkable extent, the role of conscious will in dramatic conflict. This is of great interest from a technical point of view. O'Neill has made a consistent and impassioned attempt to dramatize subconscious emotions. He frequently uses the terminology of psychoanalysis, and this terminology is often employed in discussions of his work.

—*John Howard Lawson*

(23)

O'Neill's Concept of Fate

O'Neill clings to the will to believe ; but his system of thought leaves no room for either will or belief. In his plays, the life-force is no part of life ; even emotion is negative, working in man's own heart to accomplish his destruction. O'Neill and many of his contemporaries, conceive of fate in a manner which has no parallel in any previous period of world literature or drama. In all previous epochs, man has been depicted exerting his will against objective forces. The modern fate is both in man and outside him ; it paralyzes his mind ; his consciousness and his will and his emotions are his worst enemies.

—*John Howard Lawson*

(24)

O'Neill's Insensibility to Words

O'Neill's insensibility to words—to their luster and resistance, their shimmer or weightiness--harassed him all his days. The durable images in his work are visual and aural, or the residue of his capacity for making myths : that effect of a personal pressure passionately exerted. His attempt to realize them in language clots and muddies.

—*Richard Hayes*

(25)

O'Neill's Last Plays

And at the end, something like a magnificent exhaustion overtook the dramatist : the last plays stand as a ferocious abolition of action, a mathematic demonstration of the fallacy of the free agent. Not perhaps since *Oedipus* has the futility of man's strategies been displayed dramatically with such formal yet unreadable rectitude,

Behind those plays lies the memory of Sisyphus and his "unspeakable penalty", as Camus calls it, "in which the whole being is exerted toward accomplishing nothing."

—*Richard Hayes*

(26)

O'Neill's Manichaean Vision

Diminished in mind, then, impoverished in speech, the theatre of O'Neill challenges the artist to give body to what is essentially a Manichaean vision—that ancient, somber doctrine which saw matter as irremediably tainted and man as a creature of the prince of darkness. Its romantic agony takes the form of something very like the phenomenon C. S. Lewis has called "the tragic in exile : what happens to certain elements in tragedy when they are rejected by cultured people and abandoned to the masses." The burden of O'Neill's days as an artist was the recognition of that void, and his desperate search to fill it.

—*Richard Hayes*

(27)

Interpreter of Life

In all of his plays an earnest attempt is made to interpret life ; this fact in itself places O'Neill above his predecessors in American drama and beside his colleagues in the novel and poetry. He was a good playwright insofar as he kept within the somewhat narrow range of his own sensibility. When he stays close to a fairly simple reality and when, by way of technique, he uses fairly simple forms of realism or fairly simple patterns of melodrama, he can render the bite and tang of reality or, alternatively, he can startle and stir us with his effects. If he is never quite a poet, he is occasionally able — as we have seen in *The Iceman*—to create the striking theatric image.

—*Eric Bentley*

(28)

Tragedy in Modern Dress

The classic and notorious problem about tragedy in modern dress has been that the characters, not being over life-size but rather below it, excite pity without admiration and therefore without terror. Though O'Neill has talked of an "ennobling identification" with protagonists, he has only once tried to do anything about it : only in *Mourning Becomes Electra* are the characters over life size. Unhappily this is not because of the size of their bones but, as it were, by inflation with gas, cultural and psychological.

—*Eric Bentley*

(29)

O'Neill's Plays : A Record of His Soul-Searching

His plays are, in a very real sense, a continuous record of his soul-searching. *Long Day's Journey Into Night* is the most frankly autobiographical of them ; but to a degree they all are—not in the events, perhaps but in the conflicts which are presented and in the view of life taken. Nor, in this sense, is there very much development in O'Neill's writing. The problem does not change "finding a meaning for life and comfort for the fears of death". There is, however, a very real development in his awareness of the complexity of the problems he is facing, and of the possible areas where an answer might be found—a development reflected in the changing ways he approaches the basic questions of life. Each play, then, is a new attempt to come to grips with the same old problem.

—*Robert F. Whitman*

(30)

O'Neill's Search For a Tragic Idiom

The search led him into many and varied manners of speech : realism, expressionism, naturalism, symbolism, fantasy, poetry, alone and in various combinations, as well as experiments with devices from older dramatic traditions. But behind the apparent diversity was a single impulse ; to find an idiom in which to express the human tragedy. And whatever other characteristics O'Neill may have possessed, or lacked, he had a firm grasp of one essential element of tragedy—the eternal conflict between Man's aspirations and some intransigent, ineluctable quality in life which circumscribes and limits him, and frustrates the realization of those dreams which seem to make life worth living.

—*Robert F. Whitman*

(31)

Not an Ordinary Play

Mourning Becomes Electra is no ordinary play. It is essentially different from the other late works of O'Neill, being neither a poem, nor a slice of life, nor a dramatized philosophy, nor the evocation of a mood : externally, it is a retelling of the tragic tale of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, Orestes and Electra ; an almost contemporary rearrangement of the first two parts of the Aeschylean trilogy, with a curiously modern interpretation of the theme of *The Furies* (or *The Eumenides*, depending on which translation is consulted). But it is not an exemplification of the Greek religious problem of fate, for O'Neill has reconceived the old doctrine of Nemesis in terms of the more or less modern biological and

psychological doctrine of cause and effect: here no mortal has offended a divinity; it is an American New Englander, a puritan, who has transgressed the moral code of his time and people, and the son of his victim turns upon the living representatives of his family for revenge.

—*Barrett H. Clark*

(32)

A Sternly Restrained Play

In form, the play is as sternly restrained as O'Neill's earlier work was effusive, using soliloquy occasionally and making use of the portraits of ancestors on the walls to symbolize the oppressive power of the super-ego, the life-denying sterility of the Puritan conscience. If O'Neill had told his story with a greater command of poetic language and variation from the oppressive monochrome of morbidity (which the Greeks achieved through spectacle, dance, and the lyric chorus), there would be no doubt that *Mourning Becomes Electra* belongs with the Greeks, Shakespeare, and Goethe. Even with its shortcomings, it is probably one of the two most important tragedies written in America.

—*W. David Sievers*

(33)

A Clear Narrative Design

In *Mourning Becomes Electra* Mr. O'Neill comes now into the full stretch of clear narrative design. He discovers that in expressive pattern lies the possibility of all that parallels life, a form on which fall infinite shadings and details, as the light with its inexhaustible nuances and elements appears on a wall. He has come to what is so rare in Northern art, an understanding of the depth and subtlety that lie in repetition and variation on the same design.

—*Stark Young*

(34)

A Least Symbolic Play

Mourning Becomes Electra, perhaps O'Neill's most secular play, is also his least symbolic work to date. Such symbols as exist in the play, the house, for example, or the portraits, or the flowers, are all related to the human beings at the central focus. Now, none of the conflict between character and symbol that beset many of the minor

works and such major plays as *Strange Interlude* enters to plague this study of crime and retribution. There are no ambiguities; nothing is vague or suggested. The characters are drawn precisely, their story fully told, and they move toward a comprehensible and convincing destiny. Thus O'Neill returned to his point of origin, to the realistic theatre, from whence, with the single exception of *Days Without End*, he never again departed.

—*Travis Bogard*

(35)

An Anti-Puritan Play

. Puritanism becomes the embodiment of all that is evil and degenerate in the life of man. Under the guise of its pretended ideals, man is being led to destruction. To O'Neill, Puritanism in its emphasis upon the life hereafter has destroyed life here; it is to him not a religion of salvation but a religion of death. Brigadier-General Mannon expresses what he had learned about the religion of Puritanism, and in the light of the treatment this theme gets in other plays, it may be taken as a fair statement of O'Neill's conception of Puritanism and its destructive power.

—*S. K. Winther*

(36)

O'Neill's Sense of Tragedy

In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, O'Neill exemplified what Schopenhauer declared to be the "true sense of tragedy", "that it is not his own individual sins the hero atones for, but original sin, i.e., the crime of existence itself." So devoted was he to this conception, that he permitted it to inform the entire trilogy. The pessimism of the Greeks may have been equally black, their tragedies just as aware of the crime of existence, still "they would have despised", as William James observed, "a life set wholly in a minor key, and summoned it to keep within the proper bounds of lachrymosity." The unfulfilment, exhaustion, and apathy which O'Neill's tragedies increasingly reflected were conditions completely foreign to Greek tragedy. The Greeks were never so contemptuous of life as to seek consolation in death, nor so afraid of death as to calm their fears by promising themselves the fulfilment after death of all that they had vainly yearned for in life. O'Neill is not to be censured for the predicament in which he found himself, or for the fashion in which he chose to extricate himself, but rather for misinterpreting his dream. For however, ingeniously he substituted the premises of a rationalistic psychology, however adeptly he interpolated his allegory, however glibly he spoke

of fate and destiny, crime and retribution, guilt and atonement, his dream in tragedy was not the Greek dream.

—Edwin A. Engel

(37)

Not One Play But Three

Mourning Becomes Electra is, of course, not one play but three, and is subtitled *A Trilogy*. Until shortly before its final production, O'Neill hoped to have the three plays produced on successive nights; but practical considerations prevailed, and the thirteen acts of the trilogy were produced together, following the marathon course of *Strange Interlude*. And this was both practical and artistic—the three plays had been planned and completed as a whole. Nevertheless, from its very first performance, many reviewers and readers have recognized that the third play differed from the first two. In the first two, O'Neill consciously translated classical myth into modern psychological terms; in the third, he created his own myth. The first to follow the Greek pattern more closely, whereas the third departs from it to describe a modern "Electra". Whether one likes the first two plays best, because "O'Neill was never more fully an artist than in filling out this pattern to the limit of its possibilities as melodrama", or whether one prefers the "superb conclusion, completely his own", is a matter of taste.

—Frederic I. Carpenter

(38)

O'Neill Not Indebted to Psycho-Analysts

In the "Working Notes" for *Electra* O'Neill gave a reason for Christine's hatred of her husband, which would have seemed quite unsatisfactory before Freud (and still does to some critics): "sexual frustration by his puritan sense of guilt turning love to lust" He talked about "the hidden psychic identity" between the women in the play and observed that the characters' desire to leave for their South Sea Island expresses a "longing for the primitive" and for the mother, a "yearning for prenatal noncompetitive freedom from fear." He talked about "'Island', death, fear and death wish", and after the play was completed, he spoke about "the life and death impulses" that drive the characters on to their fates. In the notes for *Days* he would similarly speak of "mother worship, repressed and turned morbid", turning into "Death-love and longing", and of the wife of the protagonist as a "mother substitute."

While these examples are of interest as proofs of O'Neill's acquaintance with and interest in the new psychology, they do not indicate any deeper indebtedness on his part and do not disprove his

claim that he was himself a keen psychologist, that his indebtedness concerned earlier men of letters rather than contemporary psychologists, and that he could have written the plays almost the way he had without any knowledge of modern depth psychology. This view can only be rejected if we can convincingly reveal that O'Neill has made use of decidedly Freudian, Jungian or Adlerian ideas in a more fundamental way in his work.

—Egil Tornqvist

(39)

What Attracted O'Neill in Aeschylus

There would be no point in comparing the O'Neill play with the Aeschylean trilogy if it were not that the attempt sheds light on the American's attitude toward his aims as a writer. O'Neill turned to Aeschylus because the Greek had ready to hand a set of conventions that enabled him to present certain aspects of life that seemed important, without having to explain too much of the background or history of his characters. The chorus, the masks, the formal literary language, the common heritage of history, legend, religion, politics—such were among the advantages enjoyed by the ancient Greek dramatists, who were not much concerned with the surfaces of things and the accidentals of daily existence. Greek tragedy offered O'Neill a wider field for the expression of his ideas than he could have had if he had chosen a modern scene and modern characters. Mere realism, observation, reporting, were not what he was after.

—Barrett H. Clark

(40)

Unreal Realism

Although the phrase "unreal realism" that runs through the diary suggests that some of the pretensions of the Art Theatre Show Shop still remained, the ruthless excision of the elements of technical exhibitionism for which he had become famous makes clear that the trilogy was truly the result of "a complete upheaval" of his old values, as he had claimed.

—Travis Bogard

(41)

The Source of All Tragedy

As he had done before, he turned again from the false lights he had followed, selected a model he admired and in reworking older

material found once more the sources of his creative life. This time, because the commitments of the past ten years were so strong, he could not do it easily. His own habits, his imagination, his involvement with brute size and with important themes, to say nothing of the expectations of his audiences, led him by no conscious route to the source of all tragedy, the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus, and to the later plays which spun off from it. From that primal fountain, he took new life.

—*Travis Bogard*

(42)

O'Neill's Salvation as an Artist

Mourning Becomes Electra takes its place in the forefront of many modern dramas based on Greek themes and written by the greatest names in the modern theatre : Giraudoux, von Hoffmannsthal, Eliot, Sartre, Shaw among many others. It is part of the twentieth-century Greek revival ; yet, for all this, the work emerged as the end product of private necessity. The irony presents itself : *Days Without End*, a story of salvation, meant damnation for its author ; whereas his study of the damned brought his own salvation as an artist.

—*Travis Bogard*

(43)

O'Neill's Modern Parallels For the Electra Story

His modern parallels for the Electra story are appropriate and unforced. The Civil War and the New England Greek-style architecture provided a satisfactory time and place for his history. The details of the relationships in the House of Atreus created the structure of the Mannon clan. The names, following the punning allusion to "Agamemnon" in Ezra Mannon, with its connotation of power and wealth, were developed by the alliterative scheme which at one time he tried to maintain in Lavinia by calling her "Elavinia". In the ancient servant of Electra he found Seth, just as Peter emerged from Pylades and Hazel from such innocents as Sophocles' Chrysothemis. In similar fashion his chorus of gossips came naturally, if not entirely convincingly, from his source. Such details are obvious, but less so is O'Neill's remarkable fidelity to basic motifs of the myth : the presence of the sea in the Troy story finds congenial recapitulation in O'Neill's response to the sea and the islands of the South Pacific ; the primitive need to honour the dishonoured father, and the horrifying origin of the curse in the devouring of children is echoed in the fate of the Mannon heirs, Lavinia, Orin and Adam Brant ; the sense of a haunted world,

peopled with ghosts, and of men and women thrust into action by the dictates of a compulsive and destructive will and pursued by the furies of their own guilt are admirably brought into alignment with the legend. By the same token the trilogic structure parallels in its scope the cyclic evolution of the *Oresteia.*

—Travis Bogard

(44)

A History Play

The mixture of ancient and modern, Aeschylus and Freud, has tended to obscure two important qualities of the trilogy. The first is that it is a history play, and an excellent one. Granted that the Civil War offered a luckily appropriate means of modernizing the post-Trojan-war period of the legend, O'Neill has been at pains to make his image of post-war New England faithful in spirit and fact to what it was. Without much apparent research and with stringently economic means he has created the past: a song, cannon shots celebrating the surrender, a few names from history, lilacs almost inevitably associated through Walt Whitman's elegy with the death of Lincoln.

—Travis Bogard

(45)

Re-creation of the Past

In less elaborate ways, his re-creation of the past proves unexpectedly strong. For example in describing his feeling of the safety of a military encampment at night, Ezra Mannon says, "I can't get used to home yet. It's so lonely. I've got used to the feel of camps with thousands of men around me at night—a sense of protection maybe!" The words have no direct reference to the past, but they convey it vividly. The song "Tenting Tonight" sounds faintly in the mind, and the past awakes through the response of a character to his environment. As many who have lain awake in a barrack at night may recognize, the words are verifiable in present experience, and again the passage seems true for both past and present. O'Neill's remark that the historical images are "surface stuff" is less than accurate. Even if his emphasis is on the present, at no point does the play's modernity violate the image of the past. The two are conjoined to convey truth.

—Travis Bogard

(46)

The Chorus

The Chorus, small town civic types—carpenters, sailors, clerks, doctors, gossips, visiting cousins, business men, ministers—convey something of the typicality of the chorus of *Lazarus Laughed*, but they are not so diagrammatically conceived as to create a symbolic unit. They only sketch what O'Neill called "the human background for the drama of the Mannons."

—*Travis Bogard*

(47)

Use of Freudian Psychology

O'Neill is right in asserting that as a dramatist, and therefore presumably something of a student of human nature, he will necessarily see patterns that reflect Freudian truths. Yet this explanation, while it satisfies for Shakespeare and for Sophocles, does not quite relive O'Neill of indebtedness to psychoanalytic theory, which loomed large in his life in the years immediately preceding the writing of the trilogy.

—*Travis Bogard*

(48)

Crime and Punishment

In the course of the action his characters find no peace nor adjustment; the long analysis they undergo brings no satisfaction. That this is so is because O'Neill, while accepting modern psychoanalytic theory, still holds to the idea of crime and punishment, that he inherited from the source in legend. In tragedy, human crime is punished by the Gods who control human destiny. A divinity shapes the end. O'Neill understands that psychoanalysis can mean an end to repression, and he causes all the Mannons to seek such an end, but he does not permit purgation to occur. Relying heavily on the Calvinistic traditions of the New England Puritan culture, his final view of the Mannons is as a dynasty bound as if by a divine edict to its destiny. "Bound" is the operative word in Seth's chanty "Shenandoah", and the repressions of Puritanism are constantly recalled through the presence of the spying townspeople, through the house and the ancestral portraits, and through the longings of all the Mannons for a different condition: for flowers, for the freedom of the sea, for the Blessed Isles. Yet they are bound as if they were in fact controlled by an angry God. The tangled web of love and lust in which they struggle is called an "evil destiny" that shapes their lives.

—*Travis Bogard*

(49)

Elimination of the Gods

The deliberate elimination of the Gods is perhaps the clearest sign of O'Neill's determination to make of his version of the Electra myth an uncharacteristic kind of play. In the context of his other plays written in the twenties, it is an altogether startling phenomenon. His theological plays for the Art Theatre had all been concerned with what O'Neill called the "Big Theme", the quest for God or a God substitute. Now the Gods are gone except for the atavistic traces they have left in the basic legend. What is more, no one seeks them : the motif of the questing dreamer is notable by its sudden absence. Such religious concern as in the play is a matter of historical place, a part of the background, but not a part of the play's thematic centre.

—*Travis Bogard*

(50)

The Blessed Isles

The image of the Blessed Isles is derived, in all probability, from the scene of the second book of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. O'Neill, however, has made no further use of Nietzsche's philosophy, except to suggest that the islands, like the sea, like the longed-for mother, are all one, and that in them man can sink into rapture and forgetfulness. The description of the islands carry into the play some of the feeling of Dionysian ecstasy so pronounced in *Desire Under the Elms*. Ephraim had said to Abbie, "Sometimes ye air the farm an' sometimes the farm be yew," and for both Orin and Adam, Christine is the embodiment of the beauty, security and peace of the earthly paradise. In *The Hunted*, Orin, telling his mother of Melville's *Typee*, speaks of a dream that came to him in a delirium. He was on Melville's islands, alone with his mother : "And yet I never saw you... I only felt you all around me. The breaking of the waves was your voice. The sky was the same colour as your eyes. The warm sand was like your skin. The whole island was you" To all the Mannons, even Ezra, who proposes that he and Christine take ship to find such an island, the symbol of the Islands means the same hope.

—*Travis Bogard*

34

Selected Critical Questions With Answers

Q. 1. **Discuss *Mourning Becomes Electra* as a tragedy.**

Or

Q. 2. **Do you find in *Mourning Becomes Electra* an exemplification of O'Neill's departure from Greek concept of tragedy ?**

Or

Q. 3. **Examine *Mourning Becomes Electra* as a tragic play especially in the light of Joseph Wood Krutch's modified views on O'Neill's tragic concept of life.**

Or

Q. 4. **In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, O'Neill exemplifies what Schopenhauer declared as the "true sense of tragedy", namely, "that it is not his own individual sins the hero atones for, but original sin, i.e., the crime of existence itself." Discuss.**

Or

Q. 5. **"*Mourning Becomes Electra* offers a solution not to the problem of existence but to that of non-existence ; it reconciles not to life but death." Do you agree ?**

Or

Q. 6. **"O'Neill is almost alone among modern dramatic writers in possessing what appears to be an instinctive perception of what a modern tragedy would have to be." Discuss with reference to *Mourning Becomes Electra*.**

Or

Q. 7. The spectacle of characters in *Mourning Becomes Electra* is "not only absorbing but also and at once horrible and cleansing." Does this statement truly reveal the nature of tragedy in the play ?

Schopenhauerian Concept of Tragedy

In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, O'Neill exemplified what Schopenhauer declared to be the "true sense of tragedy", namely, "that it is not his own individual sins the hero atones for, but original sin, i.e., the crime of existence itself." So devoted was he to this conception, that he permitted it to inform the entire trilogy. The pessimism of the Greeks may have been equally black, their tragedies just as aware of the crime of existence, still "they would have despised", as William James observed, "a life set wholly in a minor key, and summoned it to keep within the proper bounds of lachrymosity". The unfulfilment, exhaustion, and apathy which O'Neill's tragedy increasingly reflected were conditions completely foreign to Greek tragedy. The Greeks were never so contemptuous of life as to seek consolation in death, nor so afraid of death as to calm their fears by promising themselves the fulfilment after death of all that they had vainly yearned for in life. O'Neill is not to be censured for the predicament in which he found himself, or for the fashion in which he chose to extricate himself, but rather for misinterpreting his dream. For however ingeniously he substituted the premises of a rationalistic psychology, however adeptly he interpolated his allegory, however glibly he spoke of fate and destiny, crime and retribution, guilt and atonement, his dream in tragedy was not the Greek dream.

It Reconciles to Death

The appearance of *Mourning Becomes Electra* subsequent to Krutch's estimate in 1929 of modern tragedy gave Crutch no cause to revise his assertion that the "tragic solution of the problem of existence, the reconciliation to life by means of the tragic spirit is... only a fiction surviving in art." Indeed, O'Neill's play bears out the statement by achieving precisely the opposite results : *Electra* offers a solution not to the problem of existence but to that of nonexistence ; it reconciles not to life, but to death. Nor did O'Neill invoke that Tragic Spirit which Krutch regarded as the product either of a "religious faith in the greatness of God" or of "faith in the greatness of man" although by 1932 it seemed to Krutch that he had satisfied this demand, that he had, in short, succeeded in investing man "once more with the dignity he has lost". "The greatness of the plays", he insisted, begging the question, "lies in the fact that they achieve a grandeur which their rational framework is impotent even to suggest."

Horrible and Cleansing

In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, he was convinced that "once more we have a great play which does not 'mean' anything in the sense that the plays of Ibsen or Shaw mean something, but one which does, on the contrary, mean the same thing that 'Oedipus' and 'Hamlet' and 'Macbeth' mean—namely, that human beings are great and terrible creatures when they are in the grip of great passions, and that the spectacle of them is not only absorbing but also and at once horrible and cleansing." Here, it seems Krutch is entirely wrong. Not only has he missed the "meaning" of O'Neill's trilogy, he has discerned in O'Neill's characters qualities that are mostly nonexistent. They are characters, moreover, whose passions are infantile rather than great, are a spectacle that is horrible but scarcely cleansing. Catharsis is a condition which O'Neill seldom achieved, preferring, as he did, narcosis or necrosis. That the deficiencies of *Mourning Becomes Electra*, when it is compared "with the very greatest works of dramatic literature", are limited only to its language, is an opinion which, if our judgments have been even moderately sound, has little to be said in its support. There is equally little to be said for Krutch's contrast of Ibsen and O'Neill and, wherein he finds that O'Neill avoided the central fault of Ibsen's tragedies, namely, that they are "too thoroughly pervaded by a sense of human littleness to be other than melancholy and dispiriting."

Instinctive Perception of Tragedy

Having defined "true tragedy...as a dramatic work in which the outward failure of the principle personage is compensated for by the dignity and greatness of his character", Krutch concludes that "O'Neill is almost alone among modern dramatic writers in possessing what appears to be an instinctive perception of what a modern tragedy would have to be." Yet one has only to strip *Mourning Becomes Electra* of its spiritual malaise, its Freudian machinery, its selfconscious symbolism, its Gothic properties, its turgid style, to see how little better O'Neill has succeeded than Ibsen in satisfying Krutch's definition of "true tragedy". *Ghosts*, too, was a tragedy of family guilt in which the original scene is traced to the life-denying impulse. One side is happiness, on the other is "the source of the misery in the world" : law, order, duty. Living in the house polluted by her husband's profligacy, Mrs. Alving, the counterpart of Christine, revolts against the restrictive virtues which society has imposed upon her and which prevented Alving from finding "any outlet for the overmastering joy of life that was in him". Oswald, haunted by his father's sin, suffers not only physical consequences thereof, but repeats—like Orin—the parents' behaviour. Where Orin is afflicted with a stubborn case of *Weltschmerz*, and complications induced by a wound in the head—the dowry of the Mannons in

general, Ezra in particular—Oswald suffers from congenital syphilis—the indirect inheritance of the Mannons' way of life, but the direct consequence of his father's dissolute actions. When, at the conclusion of the tragedy, Oswald locks himself and his mother inside their haunted house for paying out the family curse much as Lavinia is. Surely the madness of a paretic is not more melancholy and dispiriting than the masochism of a woman who denies herself the pleasure of dying.

The Emotional Dynamics

More restrained than Krutch, George Jean Nathan never compared *Mourning Becomes Electra* "with the very greatest works of dramatic literature", but he did declare it to be "indubitably one of the finest plays that the American theatre has known". Like Krutch, he mistook *Weltschmerz* for tragedy and ascribed purgative powers to hyper-emotionalism and to the manifestations of a neurotic sensibility. But Nathan came closer to the truth when he observed that O'Neill's "passionate inspiration", "the sweep and size of his emotional equipment and emotional dynamics" transcended the characters and the play. This is a euphemistic way of saying that *Mourning Becomes Electra* contains no adequate equivalent for the playwright's excess of feeling. It is a fault that is present in most of O'Neill's plays, and O'Neill himself was apparently aware of it when in *Mourning Becomes Electra* he consciously shunned "the many opportunities for effusions of personal writing about life and fate." If the trilogy is less effusive than some of the preceding plays, it's grandiosity is threefold greater than most. If it contains less "personal writing", it is far from reticent concerning the author's conception of life and fate, a conception which suggests that the glow felt by Nathan to be spreading over all—"the glow that is O'Neill"—is less "luminous and radiant" than feverish.

Q. 8. Discuss O'Neill's departure in *Mourning Becomes Electra* from the original source of the play

Or

Q. 9. "Although certain important departures are made from the Greek story, the main line of action is made clear at once from the Greek analogue and the main characters possess an authority immediately derived from those in Aeschylus." Comment on the validity of the above statement.

Or

Q. 10. "Most conspicuously, the trilogy is O'Neill's Greek tragedy." Comment on the above statement about *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

Or

Q. 11. "Aeschylus could take it for granted that his audience knew what the Trojan War was about, as O'Neill had only to suggest his time and place, knowing that he need not explain much about the Civil War or a New England city." Examine the degree and nature of O'Neill's indebtedness (in *Mourning Becomes Electra*) to Aeschylus.

Or

Q. 12. "O'Neill soon saw that he could not plan very well his story against a present-day background, the time of the Civil War was just remote enough." Do you think it to be a sound reason for O'Neill's departure from the Greek original ?

Or

Q. 13. What difference in emphasis, tone and meaning do you find between O'Neill's play and Aeschylus' *Oresteia* ?

Central Problem of the Play

The central problem of *Mourning Becomes Electra* lies in O'Neill's first note concerning the play : "Is it possible to get modern psychological approximation of Greek sense of fate into such a play, which an intelligent audience of today, possessed by no belief in gods or moral retribution, could accept and be moved by ?"

The Difference of Audience

This must have given him no little trouble. After all, Aeschylus did write for an audience that accepted a set of more or less established moral, religious and political dogmas, and it was not necessary for him to answer such questions as modern American audience must have answered before they will accept the premises laid down in a play. And we must remember that the *Oresteia* was based upon legends as familiar to fifth-century Athens as the Bible stories were to puritan New England. A Fundamentalist never thinks of asking about Adam's parentage ; he knows.

O'Neill's Difficulties

O'Neill soon saw that he could not plan very well his story against a present-day background ; the time of the Civil War was

just remote enough. "Civil War", he noted, "is only possibility—fits into picture—Civil War as background for drama of murderous family love and hate." Yet that epoch is far enough removed for us to accept certain conventions without demanding a meticulous explanation for every motive, but close enough to enable us to identify ourselves with the ideas and emotions of the characters. Aeschylus could take it for granted that his audience knew what the Trojan War was about, so O'Neill had only to suggest his time and place, knowing that he need not explain much about the Civil War or a New England city.

Similarity of Situations

The *Agamemnon* and *Homecoming* are concerned with situations that are fundamentally alike. In Aeschylus' play, Agamemnon returns to his wife, Clytemnestra, who has been unfaithful to him with Aegisthus, Agamemnon's cousin ; Clytemnestra murders him because he has sacrificed their daughter Iphigenia, because he brings home with him a concubine, and because she wants Aegisthus to rule over the kingdom. In the O'Neill play, Ezra Mannon returns to his wife Christine, who has been unfaithful to him with Captain Adam Brant, Ezra's cousin ; Christine murders him because she has always hated him and wants to marry Adam.

The Counterparts of Electra and Orestes

Neither Electra nor Orestes has a place in the Greek play, and Orestes is scarcely mentioned ; he is no more than an ominous note in a speech of Cassandra's, and is one of the choral chant. In omitting Cassandra and the choruses (except for the modern counterpart of the townspeople, who are used chiefly as background), and in not suggesting a direct parallel to the sacrifice of Iphigenia, O'Neill has to furnish some substitute for the material introduced into the ancient story by these means, not because he was trying to "modernize" Aeschylus, but because he was establishing a dramatic embodiment of the fate that perceived the house of Mannon. The fact that Clytemnestra was jealous of Cassandra is of little importance, and the sacrifice of Iphigenia—for O'Neill's purpose—is just as irrelevant. So, instead of making Orestes the chief instrument of vengeance, as Aeschylus did in the second part of his trilogy, he at once gave to Lavinia the combined dramatic function of the prophetess, the avenger Orestes and the choruses. It is she who learns the story of the feud between Ezra's grandfather, Abe, and his brother, David ; she learns that her mother's lover Brant is the son of David and the servant girl Marie Brantome ; and because she is an inevitable product of the combined hatreds of her parents and their parents in turn, she cannot rest until she has perceived the guilty

parties to their final punishment. She will see to it that they pay the price of sin.

O'Neill's Departures

The Greek legend tells that Atreus and Thyestes, sons of Pelops, "dwelt at Argos with Eurystheus the king...and when he died, Atreus ruled in his place, and wedded his daughter. But Thyestes wronged his brother's wife, and was banished from Argos. And after a while he returned again, and clung into the altar at Argos ; and Atreus, fearing to slay him, devised this deed. He slew certain of the children of Thyestes, and bade him to a banquet, and gave him to eat of his own children's flesh ; and he ate, knowing not what it was. But when he knew what was done he spake a bitter curse upon children of Atreus, that they should all perish by a doom like that of his own children. And there befell these woes into that house, and for three generations the curse of murder departed not away."

Not for a moment does the Greek poet allow us to forget that because of the first sin of Thyestes and Atreus the gods have decreed and sought retribution and suffering from the guilty. With occasionally tiresome insistence, chorus after chorus repeats the degree of that

impious deed
From which that after-growth of ill doth rise.

Whereas with Aeschylus the first play ends with the temporal triumph of Clytemnestra, with O'Neill Christine stands already charged with murder by her daughter, a woman whom we feel once to be mistress of the situation.

Comparison Between the Second Parts

The Libation-Bearers, the second play of the Greek trilogy, introduces Orestes and Electra, but the woman soon fades into the background and Orestes undertakes alone to pursue his mother and her lover. He has consulted the Delphic oracle and is commanded by Apollo to punish the guilty pair, in accordance with the decree of Zeus ; he acts quickly, with the help of his friend Pylades, but almost immediately after the double murder he is beset by the avenging Furies, symbols of yet another power not under the control of Zeus and at variance with the laws of the Olympian hierarchy, and he is driven mad.

In O'Neill's second play, *The Hunted* we follow up to a certain point the same broad course of events : Lavinia and her brother

Orin together track down Christine and Adam, kill the man, and drive their mother to suicide. In the belief that her mission is ended Lavinia turns to her temporarily unbalanced brother, determined at last to find happiness, and ultimately to marry the normal and unimaginative Peter. But she has reckoned without the Furies, those powerful and as yet not fully understood forces within us that wreck mind and body when they are no longer under control. Orin, being the weaker, is the first to succumb. His case is complicated by a certain introspective malady that was unknown to or at least not touched upon by Aeschylus.

O'Neill's Independence of the Greek Model

At this point O'Neill declares his virtual independence of the Greek model. Aeschylus carried him as far as was necessary. It would have been useless and absurd to attempt to utilize to any great extent a modern counterpart to the Furies, the third part of the Greek trilogy. It is in some respects a political and patriotic document and in writing the last part of it the Greek poet side-stepped the moral and psychological problems he had raised and up to that point developed. What, we wonder and demand to know, will Orestes do, torn between two opposed forces, the one a command from the chief of the gods, the other a personified urge from the irresistible goddesses of vengeance ? It was fated that such-and-such events should come to pass, that the family of Atreus should suffer for the wrongs committed by certain of its members ; yet to make doubly sure that he was the instrument ordained to punish the guilty, Orestes had scrupulously performed his religious duties and consulted the oracle, presumably the highest source of religious authority. His God commanded him to do the deed, yet upon committing it he found he had transgressed another law, decreed by the Furies. For a man in such a dilemma the only wayout according to Aeschylus, was to appeal to the highest court in the most enlightened country : Aeschylus' country, and the local court of the Areopagus at Athens.

Instead of facing the issue, or carrying it to some higher source of moral justice, or even leaving it unsolved, among those problems that men simply cannot fathom, he shows us Orestes appealing to Athena, the patron goddess of the very city whose people made up Aeschylus' audience :

> I call Athena, lady of this land
> To come, my champion.

Punishment For Matricide

But the Furies are no less insistent upon their rights, Athena or no Athena ; for it is their claim that matricide is punishable by

annihilation, no matter what the motive that prompted it. A jury of Athenian citizens is summoned by the goddess, court is held on the Areopagus and Orestes is tried. The goddess addresses the Furies : "The form of justice, not its deed, thou willest." The jury is divided, but Athena, who herself decreed that she should have the deciding vote in case of a tie, absolves her suppliant. The Furies complain :

> Now are they all undone, the ancient laws
> ...New wrong for ancient right shall be
> 'f matricide go free.

A long argument follows, and at last the Furies consent not only to accept the verdict, but to b: friendly, for Athena promises them "great honour from the Athenians, and a sacred dwelling in the land..., and they were appeased, and were called no more Furies, but gracious goddesses." Orestes virtually disappears from the play at this point, as Aeschylus brings his trilogy to its wordy closing scene. The opposing parties are reconciled by acknowledging the supremacy of the Athenian tribunal in matters of religion and state. That this was propaganda to strengthen the prestige of the Athenian court at a moment when it was threatened by the popular party is well known. The father of drama has avoided the very issues he raised, either because he could not make up his mind as to whether Orestes was guilty or not, or because he cared more about the government of his own city than he did about his trilogy.

O'Neill's Departures in "The Haunted"

In the third O'Neill's play, *The Haunted*, the playwright parts company almost entirely from Aeschylus. He might, of course, by way of furnishing a counterpart to *The Furies*, have taken Lavinia and Orin before the Supreme Court at Washington and introduced an archbishop instructing the nine justices as to what procedure they should adopt in dealing with the culprits. Further, the jury would have to be told it would remain forever, under proper religious guidance, the ultimate standard of all human conduct.

However, instead of avenging Furies, placated by a mere bribe (this at least is a modern touch), O'Neill gives us an exhibition of complexes, a picture of moral and mental struggle that, in its broad aspects, is acceptable to us today.

Focus on Lavinia and Orin

In addition to this, while Aeschylus conducted his matricide into the arms of a politically prejudiced goddess who tried him by

unfair means and absolved him from guilt in order to glorify Athens. O'Neill focussed his attention on Lavinia, plus Orin (these two being his Orestes). Lavinia, the product of those very forces in her family which precipitated its peculiar and inevitable fate, dicovers that she has at last become like her own mother, that in demanding payment for sin that grew out of lust and hatred she herself is inevitably drawn to her own brother and even to the naked savages, now that her father, towards whom she was also drawn by forces not exactly filial, is no longer alive. All her natural instincts, thwarted by a maniacal desire for vengeance, have turned in upon her. This is her fate, and she marches to a doom which is actually inescapable, from which no good-from-the-machine, no benign court, no accomodating dramatist, is able to save her. For such victims of the evil that seems inherent in life there is no salvation.

No Use of Masks

Instead of using masks to show what has happened to Orin and Lavinia, O'Neill simply states in his stage directions that they have come to resemble their parents, a bit of symbolism more strikingly dramatic than he could have achieved if he had actually made the actor put on masks. "I'm now", says Orin, "in Father's place and you're Mother......That's the evil destiny out of the past I haven't dared to predict ! I'm the Mannon you're chained to !" Out of the mouth of this demented man has come the ultimate truth. Like the inspired Cassandra, he perceives through his disordered mind the meaning of the curse.

Laurels For O'Neill

So, whatever may be thought of O'Neill's purely literary achievement as compared with the poetry of Aeschylus, we should give the American the wreath of laurel or the cask of wine that goes to the victor, for working out his fate motif with greater skill and more courage and a deeper under,tanding of the human mind than the Greek had done. O'Neill was at least after the truth as he saw it, while Aeschylus sought the less honourable course of glorifying his state and its official religion.

Q. 14. "*Mourning Becomes Electra* **is the drama of a soul at mortal grips with the love of self, the deadly poison of the spirit that denies all creation because it would be self-creative, self-sufficient, both creator and creature, man coequal with God." Discuss.**

Or

Q. 15. "The central theme of *Mourning Becomes Electra* is the evil of love of self and high price one has to pay for it." Is it true assessment of the theme of the play ?

Or

Q. 16. Discuss *Mourning Becomes Electra* as an indictment of puritanic love of self.

Or

Q. 17. Examine the following comment on the male characters in *Mourning Becomes Electra* :

> **Each of the male Mannons must die if the soul is to live.**

Or

Q. 18. "The redemption from man's self-love can be found only through the death of man himself at the hands of what is itself evil." Does it indicate the real theme of the play ?

Deadly Combat

R. D. Skinner rightly observes that "*Mourning Becomes Electra* is the drama of a soul at mortal grips with the love of self, the deadly poison of the spirit that denies all creation because it would be self-creative, self-sufficient, both creator and creature, man coequal with God." The House of Mannon in this play is the summation of man in which the multitudinous characters that have gone before are only pale, premonitory shadows of the realities at last revealed—the false prides, the timid abasements, the yearning for childlike peace, the struggles for freedom, exultant discoveries and crests of hope and the heartrending plunges into renewed darkness. Each of the male Mannon himself must die if the soul is to live, killed by, dying to his old self in the mystic formula of the poets and saints, if he is to be reborn to life and love. In this struggle to the death, it is only the spirit of the woman which lives on in solitary expiation, "until the curse is paid out and the last Mannon is let die." Behind the closed doors of that house, the feminine soul, last to die to itself, must find the secret of purgation in silence and alone, beyond the gaze of men, in the sanctuary of the immortal inner will, where only the breath of God may touch its darkness.

Main Threads of Plot

In the first play entitled *The Hunted* General Ezra Mannon, one of a long line whose wealth and position have been gathered from

the sea, returns from the war at a time when his partly foreign wife, Christine, has secretly been giving her love to a sea captain, Adam Brant. She knows him to be the son of another Mannon who "disgraced" his family by marrying a French-Canadian servant girl. Brant is genuinely in love with Christine, but in first seeking her out. his sole purpose was revenge on the present head of the house of Mannon. Christine's daughter Lavinia is devotee to her father with an almost fanatical attachment, and doubly resents her mother's infidelity, partly because she herself is attracted to Brant, who resembles her father, and partly because she has always instinctively taken her father's part against her mother, whom she hates and of whom she is inwardly jealous.

Sinister Cloud of Love-of-Self

In the first play, Lavinia's brother, Orin, is still away in camp, recovering from a serious head wound which has weakened his whole nervous system. But we learn that Orin is as much devoted to his mother, of whom he constantly dreams in his illness, as Lavinia is devoted to her father. Yet between brother and sister there is a similar bond of deep attachment—part of that sinister cloud of love-of-self, as reflected in one's own family, which hovers over the ill-fated house Lavinia lets her mother know that she has discovered her infidelity, but instead of threatening to tell her father, offers to keep silent if her mother will send Brant away forever. Christine is quick to strike at the truth of Lavinia's action. "You wanted Adam Brant for yourself", she says accusingly, "and now you know you can't have him, you're determined that at least you'll take him from me !...But if you told your father, I'd have to go away with Adam. He'd be mine still. You can't bear that thought even at the price of my disgrace, can you ?...I know you, Vinnie ! I've watched you ever since you were little, trying to do exactly what you're doing now ! You've tried to become the wife of your father and the mother of Orin ! You've always schemed to steal my place !" Of course Lavinia denies and resents these charges bitterly, but persists in her determination until her mother, in desperation, promises to send Brant away.

A Strange Homecoming

The return of General Mannon is indeed a strange homecoming. In Lavinia alone he finds genuine pleasure and affection. But he has determined, during his long years of facing death, to rediscover the secret of life and to break down, if possible the barrier he has felt between himself and his wife, ever since the earliest days of their marriage. With great difficulty, he throws aside the reserve of years and tries to tell her of his loneliness and his love. But he faces only the mocking mask of a woman who has

already determined that the only way to free herself is to kill him. She has already arranged to have Brant send her some poisonous tablets which she plans to give her husband instead of the medicine his doctor has prescribed for an increasing trouble of the heart. His heart disease will explain his death to world at large. She and Adam will be free.

In the intimacy of their first night together, when Ezra Mannon feels the false atmosphere of her pretended affection, she suddenly goads him with an open statement of her love for Brant, and tells him, moreover, Brant's true identity as one of the "outlawed" Mannons. The emotional strain brings on as she has planned, a severe heart attack. She substitutes for his medicine the poison Brant has sent her. But in his death agony, Ezra Mannon calls out for Lavinia who reaches his room just in time to see him point an accusing finger at Christine and cry out "She's guilty—not medicine!" This miscarriage of her plans is too much for Christine. She faints before she can conceal the package containing the poisonous tablets. Lavinia finds them, and at last, like the children of the House of Atreus, knows the full measure of her mother's guilt. The play ends with Lavinia's cry to the dead man, "Father! Don't leave me alone! Come back to me! Tell me what to do!"

O'Neill's Long Journey

In even the first part of this trilogy, one finds, of course, innumerable links to the struggle of the past which have beset O'Neill's imagination. The strength of the Mannon family, for example, has come from the sea. But it is also the sea, in the person of Captain Brant, which helps to kill Ezra Mannon. Ezra, in his great loneliness of soul, is not unlike any number of the lonely souls, old and young, who wander through the stages of the O'Neill's long journey, seeking but never finding understanding and completion.

Redemption From Self-Love

Christine herself is not of the Mannons. She is the unattainable "outsider" to those who love only themselves or the image of themselves. She can love Brant but only because, though part Mannon, he is the son of another stock and, like herself, part outsider, "foreigner". He is despised of the proud Mannons, because he comes of a servant stock, and the Mannons cannot serve others, being without humility. Outsiders are poisoned to the self-love of the Mannons. Yet Christine is the mother of the Mannon children of those who are destined to expiate the primal sin of the house. That which kills is also fated to be that which will bring new life, because it comes from without the charmed

and deadly circle of self-love. In this, the playwright touches instinctively upon that astounding paradox of mankind's experience, that the redemption from man's self-love can be found only through the death of man himself at the hands of what is itself evil—the outsider, the Caligula, the Pompeia, evil, in spite of itself, serving the ends of good.

Subtle and Terrific Struggle

The second part of the trilogy, *The Hunted*, comprises the revenge of Lavinia and Orin for their father's murder. Orin returns from the hospital camp two days after the tragedy while the body of Ezra is still laid out in his study. There is a subtle and terrific struggle between Lavinia and Christine for the control of Orin's weak will. Christine tries to mother him as of old, to play on his deep affection for her, and to warn him of the terrible charges he may hear from Lavinia. Christine tells him that Lavinia is really out of her mind. Intuitively, Orin feels a deep suspicion of his mother, but emotionally he cannot bear to think any evil of her. Deep in his heart, he is almost relieved at his father's death, as he can now have his mother entirely to himself, and be as a child completely immersed in her love. During the long and murderous days of the war, he has often had the vision, as he killed men, that it was "like murdering the same man over and over" and as if "the man was myself!" Their faces, he says, "keep coming back in dreams—and they change to father's face—or to mine." To be rid of his father, and also of the man in himself, so that he could return to childhood in his mother's arms had become his half conscious obsession. He wants to be alone with his mother in the enchanted Islands of his dreams, with the whole world apart from them. Christine encourages this mood in the hope that it will make Orin her champion against Lavinia.

Old Image of Death

But Lavinia, with something of the severity of her dead father, holds him grimly to a realization of the truth. She makes him, in spite of himself, acknowledge his mother's guilt, and then, finding that alone might not be enough to move him to vengeance, plays upon his instant jealousy of Brant. The thought of another man claiming his mother's love is too much for him. He and Lavinia secretly follow their mother to her rendezvous with Brant on his ship, in Boston harbour, and overhear her plans to escape. When Christine has left, Orin enters Brant's cabin and kills him. As he does so, the same old image of death comes before him. It is as if he had again killed his father!

Lavinia's Assumption of Her Mother's Role

Orin and Lavinia return to the ancient house of Mannon to tell Christine what they have done. Orin, immediately under her spell again, now that Brant is dead, begs for her forgiveness. But it is too late. Christine goes into the house and shoots herself. Orin remains to the last under the cloud of desire to have her protecting arms about him. And then the new and final theme appears—the assumption by Lavinia of her mother's role. She takes the bewildered Orin in her arms and whispers soothingly to him, "You have me, have'nt you ? I love you. I'll help you to forget." Thus Christine's accusation is justified, that Lavinia wished to take her place.

The Ghosts of Parents

The third play, *The Haunted*, begins a year later, after Lavinia and Orin have completed a year's voyage to China and the Far East. In the far land of Kublai Kaan and the Princess Kukachin, a great change has taken place. Lavinia has lost the stern angularity of former days, in which she closely resembled her father, and has become strikingly like her mother. She even wears a dress of the same green colour her mother used to wear, instead of the black she once affected. Orin, on the other hand, who was formerly unable to hold the bearing of a soldier, now carries woodenly erect. "His movements and attitudes have the statue-like quality that was so marked in his father. He now wears a close-cropped beard in addition to his moustache, and this accentuates his resemblance to his father." The children are now living in the ghost of their parents.

Both Orin and Lavinia are aware of the change. In his moments of morbid bitterness, Orin even boasts of having become a Mannon and accuses Lavinia of having acquired a soul like his mother's "as if you were stealing her—as if her death had set you free—to become her !" But Lavinia, in spite of welcoming the change in herself, cries out "What we need most is to get back to simple normal things and begin a new life." Lavinia tries sternly to make Orin face his hunting ghost, to acknowledge fully to himself his mother's double guilt and her free choice of suicide. But the attempt is only partly successful.

Fresh Touch of Reality

A fresh touch of reality also comes into Lavinia's life through her friendship for Peter Niles, whom she has known since childhood. The thought of him has been growing in her mind during the long months of her voyage. The sea has had a cleansing effect upon her. "The ship and the sea—everything that was

honest and clean" has reminded her of Peter. And another thought has come to her, too. "Remember I'm only Mannon", she reminds Peter when they are at last together. The blood of the "outsider" has been doing its work, to give her a new strength to face life. She now wants to marry Peter. But the spectre of Orin comes between them—Orin who is still sick with the old guilt of the Mannons, "possessed by the hate and death". Orin discovers Lavinia kissing Peter, and jealousy seizes him. The woman who has taken the place of his mother cannot be permitted to love another man !

A Living Terror For Lavinia

Orin becomes a living terror for Lavinia. His increasing sense of guilt makes him want to confess everything. He has allowed himself to become engaged to Peter's sister, Hazel Niles, but he is afraid to be alone with her and Lavinia is afraid to have them alone together. His guilty conscience might make him confess. He is secretly preparing a written confession of his crime —and this Lavinia suspects rather than knows. She at last forces an admission from him, and then brother and sister lacerate each other with accusation. It is again as if the ghosts of Christine and Ezra were walking in the house. And then a deeper terror than the dread of Orin's confessing intervenes. In his growing insanity and in his jealous determination to present Lavinia from marrying Peter, Orin sees Lavinia as neither mother nor sister but a woman, like the French—Canadian servant girl who was the mother of Brant. In an agony of revulsion and rage at this crowning revelation, Lavinia turns on Orin. "I wish you were dead !", she cries, "you're too vile to live ! You'd kill yourself if you weren't a coward !"

Orin's Suicide and Lavinia's Self-Punishment

Slowly the idea takes possession of Orin's deranged mind. In death he can join his mother. He will be able to ask her forgiveness. He will find peace. He starts to rush from the room. Lavinia makes an attempt to stop him, but at that moment Peter comes in and Orin escapes to his father's study. Lavinia throws herself hysterically into Peter's arms, murmuring "no one has the right to keep anyone from peace !" Peter, alarmed, starts to go after Orin, but Lavinia holds him tightly to her and talks against time. There is the sound of a shot. Orin has killed himself. Lavinia is the last of the Mannons. In the closing scene of the tragedy, after Orin's funeral, Lavinia is again in black. The resemblance to her mother has disappeared. She is filling the house with flowers for Peter, whom she feels she must marry. She must escape forever from the house of Mannon. But Hazel, to whom Orin has hinted just enough to make her feel the terror of the Mannon story, comes to accuse Lavinia of the guilt of Orin's death and to plead with her to give up Peter. Lavinia is steadfast in her determination

to marry him. But when he comes to her, she finds a growing suspicion and bitterness in his eyes. The dead are already standing between them. Almost in a frenzy, she asks him for his love, but even as she does so, the name of Adam, like the ghost of Adam Brant, escapes her lips. "I can't marry you, Peter", she cries in sudden defeat, "the dead are too strong !" And then, to drive him from her, she lies about herself. She takes a jealous word that Orin has dropped about a native in the far-off Islands they had visited and pretends the charge was true. As Peter loves her, horror-struck, she calls after him that it was a lie. But her cry is too feeble, too defeated. He does not hear. Lavinia is alone again with the Mannon dead.

Lavinia as Victim of Orin's Self-Love

To Seth, the old gardener, Lavinia confides her last resolve. There is nothing left to do but return into the house. "Don't go in there, Vinnie !" he exclaims in superstitious fright. But she is grimly determined now. "Don't be afraid", she says. "I'm not going the way Mother and Orin went. That's escaping punishment. And there's no one left to punish me. I'm the last Mannon. I've got to punish myself ! Living alone here with the dead is a worst act of justice than death or prison ! I'll never go out or see anyone ! I'll have the shutters nailed closed so no sunlight can ever get in. I'll live alone with the dead, and keep their secrets and let them hound me, until the curse is paid out and the last Mannon is let die." As she enters the house, to remain there in lifelong expiation, her movements become the wooden, angular embodiment of the Mannons.

Lavinia's Strange Cruel Smile

There is still pride left in the soul of Lavinia, and a "strange cruel smile of gloating over the years of self-torture" on her face as she begins her penance. But above and beyond the words of the playwright's description, there is feeling of deepest introversion, of the turning back of the feminine soul into its innermost depths, as if to discover, in death to herself, the one last chance of a new life. Beneath the Mannon mask of utter love of self flows the blood of the "outsider", that which brought death to all the males of the fated line, but may still find in the woman a chance for rebirth..."What we need most is to get back to simple normal things and begin a new life." That was Lavinia's cry after feeling the cleansing of the sea. One feels that in the deliberate, purposeful turning back into her past, Lavinia, the woman unlike the frightened childman who turned back to the maternal past, may discover the secret of living with fears until they are tamed, of opening her eyes to truth instead of mocking shadows, of finding tenderness in place of the sinister giants that seemed to block the agonizing path to maturity and peace.

Q. 19. "The title of *Mourning Becomes Electra* suggests the relations of the play to the Greek drama." Discuss.

Or

Q. 20. "*Mourning Becomes Electra* follows the pattern of the Greek trilogy in the essentials." Discuss.

Or

Q. 21. Examine the influence of the original Greek story of the House of Atreus on *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

Or

Q. 22. "Neither Ezra nor Christine Mannon shares the heroic stature of the Greek Agamemnon and Clytemnestra." Do you agree ?

Suggestive Title

The title of the play itself suggests the relation of the play to the Greek drama. The story of the house of Atreus was set down by Homer, Pindar, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and diverse other Greek writers whose works are not extant. From this house shadowed by an ancient curse, Agamemnon, brother of Menelaus, goes forth to the war at Troy. His wife, Clytemnestra, the sister of Helen, during her husband's absence takes for her paramour Aegisthus and shares the government of Argos with him. In due time Agamemnon having at the God's behest sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia and bringing with him Cassandra, Priam's daughter, returns, and is murdered by Clytemnestra and her lover. Electra, his daughter, is shamed and degraded and prays for the return of her brother Orestes, long ago sent out of the country by her mother and now become a man. Orestes returns, kills Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. He is pursued by the Erinyes, and only after wandering and agony and a vindication of himself before the tribunal of Athena's Areopagus is he cleansed of his sin.

Bare Outlines

Mourning Becomes Electra begins with the mother and daughter, Christine and Lavinia, waiting there in the house of the Mannons, the return of Ezra Mannon from the war, which with Lee's surrender is about over. A thread of romance is introduced between Lavinia and Peter, and between Lavinia's brother, Orin, and Hazel, Peter's sister. Meanwhile, Captain Brant comes to call ; he pays a certain court to Lavinia, and she, acting on a cue from the

hired man, who has been on the place sixty years, traps him into admitting that he is the son of one of the Mannons who had seduced a Canadian maidservant and been driven from home by his father, Lavinia's grandfather. She has all her data straight now. She has suspected her mother, followed her to New York, where Christine has pretended to go because of her own father's illness, but has in fact been meeting Adam Brant. Lavinia has written to her father and brother, hinting at the town gossip about her mother. We learn that Captain Brant had returned to avenge his mother but instead had fallen passionately in love with Christine, who loves him as passionately as she hates her husband. From this point the play moves on, with the father's hatred of the son, who returns it, the son's adoration of his mother, the daughter's and the mother's antagonism, the daughter's and father's devotion, to Christine's murder of her husband with the poison sent by Brant and substituted for the medicine prescribed against his heart trouble. Orin returns, after an illness from a wound in the head. Christine tries to protect herself in her son's mind against the plots of Lavinia. Lavinia, in the room where her father's body lies, convinces him with the facts; they trail Christine to Brant's ship, where she has gone to warn him against Orin. Orin shoots Brant. Christine next day kills herself. Brother and sister take a long voyage to China, a stop at the southern isles, come home again. Substitutions have taken place, Lavinia has grown like her mother, Orin more like his father. Meanwhile, his old affair with Hazel, encouraged at last by Lavinia, who now wants to marry Peter, is cancelled; he finds himself making an incestuous proposal to Lavinia and is repulsed by her. He shoots himself. In the end Lavinia, speaking words of love to Peter, finds Adam's name on her lips. She breaks with Peter, orders the blinds of her house nailed shut, and goes into the house, to live there till her death. Justice has been done, the Mannon dead will be there and she will be there.

The Essential Pattern

Thus it is clear that *Mourning Becomes Electra* follows the pattern of the Greek trilogy in the essentials. The first play, entitled the *Homecoming* is closest to its original. It tells of the return of General Ezra Mannon (Agamemnon) from the Civil War, and of his murder by his wife, Christine (Clytemnestra), at the urging of her lover, Adam Brant (Aegisthus). And it ends with the confrontation of the mother by her daughter, Lavinia Mannon (Electra).

Difference Between the Two Plays

Physically, the chief difference of the modern play from its original is that Christine and her lover do not stab the husband in his bath; she administers poison to him instead of the medicine he expects. But, if this difference of action seems minor, it points to a

major difference of character, neither Ezra nor Christine Mannon shares the heroic stature of the Greek Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. Ezra seems less the conquering hero than the lonely old man, and his guilt is disproportionally small—it is not the cruelty and self-willed pride of the Greek ; it is only a puritanical failure to satisfy his wife in their love-relationship. And Christine shares neither the passionate hatred of Clytemnestra for her husband, nor her passionate love for Aegisthus. Rather she seems a neurotic, vindictive woman whose nature is poisonous rather than heroic. Although the first play explains the actions of the classical Agamemnon in modern psychological terms, it substitutes neurotic hatred for the full-blooded passion and violence of the original.

The Essential Outlines

The second play of the trilogy, entitled *The Hunted* also follows the essential outlines of its Greek original. It centres upon the character of Orestes—now Orin Mannon, who has just returned from the war as this play begins. Confronted with the proof of his mother's guilt, Orin hunts down her lover and shoots him. But he does not murder his mother, as in the original Greek. Instead he tells her of her lover's death and confronts her with her guilt and with his own confused hatred of it, so that she is driven to commit suicide. The substitution of this suicide for the murder of the Greek original again emphasizes the anti-heroic nature of the modern protagonist. Nevertheless, in the case of Orin (Orestes), "the Furies" which were externalized in the Greek myth, now have been realized more dramatically in the tortured conscience of the modern "hero" and in the psychological confusions of his mind. And these psychological Furies have been motivated more fully by the modern incident of Orin's mad laughter and wounding in the war. Therefore Orin seems to be driven by the tortured conscience of all modern man, in their realization of the evil of world war.

Departures From the Greek Originals

The third play of the trilogy entitled *The Haunted* departs more radically and purposefully from the Greek originals. It centres upon the character of Electra rather than that of Orestes, and it ascribes to this new Electra the only heroism—and the only true tragedy —of the three plays. In the Greek, Electra had been married to a peasant farmer and had remained subordinate to her brother. But, in his earliest note for the future plays, O'Neill directed: "Give modern Electra figure in play tragic ending worthy of character. In Greek story she peters out into undramatic married banality." And throughout the planning and writing the trilogy he consistently developed this new conception until "Electra" became the title figure.

The Change of Action

Moreover, in changing the character of Electra from the Greek original, O'Neill also changed the action and the dramatic conception of the final play. Now, Orestes can no longer find absolution from the Furies which drive him (as he does in the Greek) ; he accepts damnation for the evil of his nature, and commits suicide, concluding : "The damned don't cry !" But Electra triumphs over the evil of her heritage by recognizing it clearly, and by determining to live with it to the end : "I'm the last Mannon. I've got to punish myself." And she begins her penance by telling Hannah "to throw out all the flowers". She locks herself in with her memories : she will escape damnation by learning fully to understand her own past and how to "cry" or "mourn" for it. At the end the modern heroine regains her humanity by undertaking a tragedy greater than that of her ancestors. She, like her creator, begins her "long day's journey into night".

Q. 23. "Death is the goal of O'Neill's Puritan." Discuss.

Or

Q. 24. "*In Mourning Becomes Electra* there is an overw helming, unrelenting sense of the imminence of death." Discuss.

Or

Q. 25. Examine John Henry Raleigh's comment on *Mourning Becomes Electra* that underneath many devices and themes there is the paramountcy of "the ubiquity of death".

Or

Q. 26. Bring out the theme of death in *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

Or

Q 27. "Since O'Neill's puritanism does not include a theological dimension, death is an end in itself, not a passage to another world" Elaborate.

Or

Q. 28. "*In Mourning Becomes Electra*, death is not merely a thematic image or simply a way of dispatching the personae and cleaning up the stage. It is the Epiphany that concludes the action, the vision to which the plot progresses." Examine.

Or

Q. 29. "No one ever reaches a conclusion ; all they know, with any certainty, is that death is surely, inexorably devouring the Mannons, their power, and their way of life." Discuss.

Or

Q. 30. "Death symbols and themes are woven into the play in all kinds of ways." Do you agree ?

Imminence of Death

Beyond the stereotyped message that "adjustment is all", and in ironic contrast to it, there is in *Mourning Becomes Electra* an overwhelming, unrelenting sense of the imminence of Death. The events of the plot—murder, murder-suicide, immurement—objectify this sense of death as does the sepulchral facade of the Mannon house. Death is the goal of O'Neill's Puritan ; he meditates on it, he walks in its shadow, he lives for it. Since this Puritanism does not include a theological dimension, Death is an end in itself, not a passage to another world.

Death as Epiphany

Thus Death is not merely a thematic image in the play or simply a way of dispatching the personae and cleaning up the stage. It is the Epiphany that concludes the action, the vision to which the plot progresses. If Greek tragedy included the death of the hero, it also provided a means of encompassing the idea of death in a framework of death-and-rebirth. O'Neill's modifications, however, result in a hopeless reiteration that death is final, absolutely conclusive, the end. In addition to the agon and the pathos, the conflict and the suffering, the *Oresteia* includes a "rebirth" or epiphany, in which the hero is purified by both society and the gods. In *Mourning Becomes Electra* however, the epiphany is a vision of Death, of existential nothingness, the individual confronted by the void. "Rebirth" and purgation become simple release from suffering through suicide or self-immurement.

The Ubiquity of Death

John Henry Raleigh says : "Underneath the play's Freudianism ; its analogizing to Greek myth ; its recurrent incest motifs generation after ; its contrast between the uninhibited sexuality of the South Seas and the rigid prudery of New England and the accompanying contrast between the freedom, rhythm, brightness, and beauty of life at sea and the restrictions, mechanizations, darkness, and dreariness of life on land ; underneath all these devices and themes is the ubiquity of death." Yes, it is

true. It is not only a question of the two murders (those of Ezra Mannon and Adam Brant) and the two suicides (Christine Mannon and Orin Mannon), but of the very fabric of the thought of the play, wherein the characters are not only trapped by their own dead but are also continually, tortuously meditating upon death. No one ever reaches a conclusion ; all they know, with any certainty, is that death is surely, inexorably devouring the Mannons, their power, and their way of life. In act third of *Homecoming* the newly returned Ezra Mannon, back home from the war, cannot stop talking about death, despite his wife's plea that he cease : "That's always been the Mannons' way of thinking. They went to the white meeting-house on Sabbaths and meditated on death. Life was a dying. Being born was starting to die. Death was being." But the war, seeing too many white walls splattered with blood "that counted no more than dirty water", made all this seem meaningless, "so much solemn fuss over death !" Real death has thought him the meaninglessness of imagined death, the Mannon obsession. But by dawn he will be death's victim, murdered by his wife. Ironically, he had earlier observed to his wife : "All victory ends in the defeat of death."

Death Symbols and Themes

Death symbols and themes are woven into the play in all kinds of ways. For example, the ancestral Mannons, whose portraits glare down from the walls of the house, were "witch-burners". Again, the black-white symbolism that is endemic in O'Neill's plays, and in American literature generally, is pervasive in *Mourning Becomes Electra* : the white faces set off by black clothing ; the white porticos of the house dimming into darkness ; and so on. And as in Melville, white does not signify purity ; rather it means the charnel house. The sound effects concur. The first song heard is "John Brown's Body". The theme song of the play, "Shenandoah", is meant to signify the more sombre aspects of the sea ("a song that more than any other holds in it the brooding rhythm of the sea"). The drunken chantyman of the fourth act of *The Hunted* staggers off singing "Hanging Johnny". Even American history plays a role in generating this aura of the charnel house, for the seminal national events in the background of the play are the Civil War, the greatest carnage experienced on American soil, and the assassination of Lincoln, its greatest single political tragedy. Moreover, beautiful, rhythmic ways of life are dying too, with the clipper giving way to the steamer. As the chantyman drunkenly and lugubriously laments to Adam Brant, the owner of a beautiful clipper : "Aye, but it ain't fur long, steam is comin' in, the sea is full smoky tea-kettles, the old days is dyin', and where'll you an' me be then ? (*Lugubriously drunken again*) Everything is dyin' ! Abe Lincoln is dead."

Q. 31. Why does every Mannon in *Mourning Becomes Electra* seek escape from the real world ?

Or

Q. 32. "The thematic image of the "Islands" runs through the entire drama and represents a uniquely American belief that a spatial remove is a panacea for all problems." Examine the statement about *Mourning Becomes Electra.*

Or

Q. 33. Examine the symbolism of the "Islands" in *Mourning Becomes Electra.*

Or

Q. 34. "The Islands in *Mourning Becomes Electra* are not only a symbol; they are also very real." Discuss.

Or

Q. 35. "As a symbol the Islands represent release from puritan guilt, the hope of an escape to love and freedom." Examine with reference to the description of Islands in *Mourning Becomes Electra*

Or

Q. 36. "For Adam, the Islands are a Garden of Eden, where sin is unknown and life simple and sweet." Do you agree ?

Or

Q. 37. "In *Mourning Becomes Electra* O'Neill uses the Islands as the surrogate to the hope of a new life." Examine this statement critically.

Or

Q. 38. What is so "mysterious and beautiful" about the South Sea Islands in *Mourning Becomes Electra* ?

Thematic Image

Thomas E. Porter has rightly observed that the "thematic image of the "Islands" runs through the entire drama and represents a uniquely American belief that a spatial remove is a panacea for

all problems." The Mannons continually consider the possibility of escape. Adam Brant, the sea captain, has been to the "Islands": he describes them in idyllic terms to Lavinia:

> Unless I'm much mistaken, you were interested when I told you of the Islands in the South Seas where I was shipwrecked on my first voyage at sea...Unless you have seen it, you can't picture the green beauty of their land set in the blue of the sea! The clouds lie down on the mountain tops, the sun drowsing in your blood, and always the surf on the barrier reef singing a croon in your ears like a lullaby! The Blessed Isles, I'd call them! You can forget there all man's dirty dreams of greed and power.

Ezra's Dream

Ezra considers the possibility of an escape when his difficulties with Christine become apparent: "I've the notion if we'd leave the children and go off on a voyage together—to the other side of the world—find some island where we could be alone a while."

Symbols of Warmth and Security

On his return from the war, Orin tells his mother of the Islands which he, as noted above, identifies with the Mother image: "Have you ever read a book called "Typee"—about the South Sea Islands...Someone loaned me the book. I read it and reread it until finally those Islands came to mean everything that wasn't war, everything that was peace and warmth and security....The whole Island was you."

Adam's Garden of Eden

For Adam, the Islands are a Garden of Eden, a *hortus conclusus* where sin is unknown and life simple and sweet. For Ezra, who does not pursue the idea, they represent isolation, freedom from the "children", a chance to begin again. For Orin they represent peace in the embrace of Mother.

Islands Are Real

But the Islands are not only a symbol in the play; they are also very real. Christine and Adam, now free of Ezra, are going to sail to the South Seas where they will be happy. Orin's rage at Adam and his mother includes an outburst about "their" Island: "I heard her asking him to kiss her! I heard her about me! And my Island I told her about—which was she and I—she wants to go there—with him!"

The Geographical Reality of the Islands

The geographical reality of the Islands, insisted on in Adam's description and Orin's reference to Melville's *Typee* becomes inescapable when, in *The Hunted,* Orin and Lavinia describe their trip there. The freedom and naturalness of the environment and the primitive innocence of the natives transform Lavinia. Peter says to Lavinia : "Gosh, you look so darned pretty—and healthy. Your trip certainly did you good ! You stopped at the Islands ?" Orin then says, "Yes, we took advantage of our being on a Mannon ship to make the Captain touch there on the way back. We stopped a month. But they turned out to be Vinnie's Islands, not mine." The feminine features of the environment bring out the feminine in Lavinia ; she blossoms out into a replica of Christine. For the nonce, she loses her puritan cast of mind, her New England inhibitions, because of the experience. As symbol, the Islands represent release from puritan guilt, the hope of an escape to love and freedom. But as reality, they project a spatial dimension and an escape "to another country". The Islands are also a real refuge that would put the house of Mannon half a world away.

Islands and the New Life

In *Mourning Becomes Electra* O'Neill uses the Islands as the surrogate to the hope of a new life. They represent a paradise in which the climate and an abundance of material goods cancel the necessity for competition—"war" of all kinds. The Mannons need not protect their fortune, or assume responsibility in the community. No class distinctions keep people apart. Lavinia walked in the moonlight with a native and everything was "simple and natural". She says : "I loved those Islands. They finished setting me free. There was something there mysterious and beautiful—a good spirit of love—coming out of the land and sea. It made me forget death. There was no hereafter. There was only this world—the warm earth in the moonlight—the trade wind in the coco palms—the surf on the reef—the fires at night and the drum throbbing in my heart—the natives dancing naked and innocent—without knowledge of sin !" The puritan ethic can be forgotten, is not necessary, because this remove is also a return. Evil does not exit on the Islands, there are no laws, there can be no consciousness of guilt. Emotions—impulses from the unconscious—have free play without the danger of remorse ; there is no conflict between desire and control, between the good of the individual and the good of society. The fertile, vernal, tranquil qualities of the place at once create and reflect the psyche of the inhabitants. Lavinia says to Peter : "I've thought of you so much. Things were always reminding me of you—the ship and the sea—everything that was honest and clean ! And

the natives on the Islands reminded me of you too. They were so simple and fine."

The "Islands" in "Homecoming"

In the first play, Adam praises the life on the "Blessed Isles" and Ezra longs to go there. Adam and Lavinia plan their flight; Orin and Lavinia actually stop there on their voyage, and the experience transforms Lavinia. O'Neill, in using this image, is drawing on a yearning to escape, to return to paradise, that links the puritan with the Freudian element of the play. If the Islands are a refuge and a paradise, they are also, as noted above, Mother. The descriptions of Adam and Orin, the transformation of Lavinia, confer on the Islands a feminine image of warmth, softness sea-bathed fecundity. Thus, in both the spatial and psychological dimensions, they represent escape, heaven and a new life.

The Islands are Unattainable

In the action the Islands are unattainable. The vision and the dream cannot be realized ; for the Mannons, there is no escape from complex or heritage. Christine and Adam never make the journey ; Lavinia and Orin return to find their dilemma unsolved, their guilt unpurged. Paradise cannot be regained by out-voyaging. Geographical Islands will not serve—Orin's jealousy blights them for him and for Lavinia also. They remain the symbol of a forlorn hope that is not transformed into a regenerating experience.

Futility of the Forlorn Hope

O'Neill does not arbitrarily assert the futility of this hope at the conclusion of the play : he foreshadows it throughout. One major device for this purpose is a choric-song, the sea-chanty "Shenandoah". *Homecoming* opens with Seth, the Mannons' gardener, singing in the "wraith of what must once have been baritone" a chorus of that melancholy song. The desire to put to sea—the sailor is bound away "across the wide Missouri"—results in frustration and separation ; the spatial dimension is not seen as an escape or a refuge, but as an unnavigable gulf : "Oh, Shenandoah, I can't get near you." The song recurs at Christine's suicide : "She's far away across the stormy water." The separation is final. The image of the Islands and the hope of escape are countered from the outset by a song of hopeless longing. The stormy waters that separate man from his desire cannot be crossed except by death.

Q. 39. "O'Neill's concern with his characters' outward appearance is quite noticeable throughout his work." How far it is true of *Mourning Becomes Electra* ?

Or

Q. 40. Comment on the character appearance as an important dramatic device in *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

Or .

Q. 41. "In *Mourning Becomes Electra* hair symbolizes strength and sexuality and eyes mirror the souls of characters." Discuss.

Or

Q. 42. Examine the symbolic importance of character appearance in *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

Concern With Physical Features

O'Neill's concern with his characters' outward appearance is quite noticeable throughout his work. From the beginning we find detailed character description, whose amplitude tends to increase in the late plays. Attention is paid to the characters' age, constitution, complexion, facial traits, hair, costume, voice and manner. But in most cases all these characteristics are not discussed with regard to one and the same character—an indication, perhaps, that O'Neill was not thinking in terms of production when finally shaping the plays for the printers but rather took the approach of novelist, who is free to limit himself to those visual characteristics he finds important and illuminating and ignore the rest. A director of *Interlude* must obviously find costume for all the characters in all the acts. But O'Neill accepts for Marsden only incidentally—usually when he finds symbolically relevant—tells us what the characters wear. In the majority of cases, however, attention is paid to the hair and eyes of the characters. In agreement with traditional symbolism, the hair frequently has connotation of strength and sexuality, while the eyes mirror the souls of the characters.

Symbolism of Hair and Eyes

If the masklike faces in *Mourning Becomes Electra* establish the puritan male tradition, the woman's hair and eyes symbolize the opposing 'pagan' one. The pallor and immobility of the death mask juxtaposed to the living colours of hair and eyes, represent the

battle between the stern, life-denying Father God, Jehovah, and the soft, life-affirming Earth Mother. The significance of the hair was partly outlined in the "Working Notes" :

> peculiar gold-brown hair exactly alike in Lavinia and her mother—same as hair of the dead woman, Adam's mother, whom Ezra's father and uncle had loved—who started the chain of recurrent love and hatred and revenge – emphasize this motivating fate out of past .. strange, hidden psychic identity of Christine with the dead woman and of Lavinia...with her mother.

In the play, Christine has thick curly hair, partly a copper brown, partly a bronze gold, each shade distinct and yet blending with the other. Lavinia has the same peculiar shade of copper-gold hair. And both Adam and Seth verify that Marie Brantome had hair of the same unusual kind. The richness of the hair points to primitive, vigorous sensuality, the strength of which is further indicated by the metallic references. These also serve the purpose of raising the women above the common run of men, vaguely suggesting their kinship with the royal dynasty of golden Mycenae. But above all, the two colours of the women's hair, distinct from each other yet harmoniously blending, suggest the warm sun and earth of the South Sea Islands and the good spirit of love that reigns there.

Women's Eyes and the Islands

The eyes of the women further link them with the Islands. O'Neill carefully distinguishes between them. We hear of Marie's "big, deep, sad eyes that were as a Caribbean Sea." There is no indication that Marie ever acquired the masklike appearance the Mannons have otherwise grown on their wives ; on the contrary, the sadness of her eyes suggests that she never hardened herself to life but remained open and vulnerable to it. In this respect she resembles the Chantyman, another former servant of the Mannons unaffected by their puritanism ; his eyes, too, are the "big round blue" ones of the sea.

Symbolism of Colour of Eyes

While Christine and Lavinia retain the sea and sky colour of Marie's eyes—a dark violet blue—they are somewhat further removed from its spiritual origin. Christine's eyes are deep-set and alive but apparently not especially large ; Lavinia's seems to have lost even their depth. The soul destroying puritan influence can be traced further to Seth and Borden—both long-time servants of the Mannons with their small, sharp eyes. The fact that Ezra's eyes are never

described seems significant in this context; symbolically, his mask has grown so dominant that he has become virtually eyeless.

Voluptuous Figure

One more visual trait brings the three women and the islanders together. Christine, we learn, has a fine, voluptuous figure and she moves with a flowing animal grace. Marie, too, had something free and wild about her like an animal. She was pretty as well. And Lavinia, after her return from the Islands, looks and moves like her mother and declares that the Islands have set her free

Variety of Longings

The symbolism resembles the one in *The Hairy Ape*. The naked islanders enjoy the freedom and harmony of animals, and the free women, especially Marie, have retained much, if not all, of their sense of belonging. But in *Mourning Becomes Electra* the women may also be said to represent man's harmony with life preceding his Fall, while the Mannons, with their strong puritan sin consciousness, illustrate his state of mind after it. Apart from the Darwinian longing to return to animal status and the Christian-puritan yearning for a lost paradise of a sinlessness, there is the Freudian longing for the maternal womb. It is all these longings tâken together that gives scope and significance to the Mannons' love for their woman-islands.

Psychic Identity

The fated chain of hidden psychic identity is established by means of a series of striking parallel situations. In Part II Adam tells Lavinia:

> You won't meet here like yours and hers again in a month of Sundays I only know of other women who had it. You'll think it strange when I tell you. It was my mother......Yes, she had beautiful hair like your mother's, that hung down to her knees.

This should not be taken as calculating flattery. It is true that Adam's quoting of Lavinia seems largely motivated by his need to keep appearances and divert suspicions from his adulterous relationship with Christine. Yet this does not explain why he has recently gone as far as kissing the young girl; surely, this was not part of his scheme, far less of Christine's. We must assume, that he

simply could not resist it. Reminiscing their moonlight romance, Adam dreams :

> Whenever I remember those Islands now, I'll always think of you as you walked beside me that night with your hair blowing in the sea wind and the moonlight in your eyes.

Puritanism Versus Paganism

The free-flowing hair and the eyes belong with the sea, the wind and the Islands—especially with the one named Marie Brantome, the lost paradise which the mother-fixated, guilt-ridden Adam constantly longs for ; momentarily, in the dreamy light, she comes alive to him in Lavinia ; insofar as Lavinia recalls his mother, she is lovable. Adam would most certainly have fallen in love with her, had she not by the circumstances been an unfit love object and had she not repressed her maternal nature in favour of her Mannon rigidity : she wears her hair pulled tightly back, as if to conceal its natural curliness. Lavinia, on her part, apparently agreed to Adam's kissing her ; for all her puritanism, she is not insensitive to the 'pagan' values. Her negative reaction at this point is easily explained by the fact that since the moonlight romance, she has come to suspect that Adam is her mother's lover. Basically, however, it is not Christine's rivalry she fears but Marie's ; her outbursts against the low Canadian girl reveal most of all her jealousy of the woman Adam truly loves, who partook of the affirmative qualities Lavinia secretly longs for. In this way the scene demonstrates the power of the dead over the living.

Similar Situation

In Part I. III there is a similar situation, this time between Ezra and Christine : Ezra leans towards her and touches her hair with an awkward caress. When he speaks his voice trembles with desire and a feeling of strangeness :

> You're beautiful ! You look more beautiful than ever—and strange to me. I don't know you. You're younger. I feel like an old man beside you. Only your hair is the same—your strange beautiful hair I always—.

Christine shrinks from his hand with a start of repulsion and says, "Don't". Adam might have uttered Ezra's last words a circumstance which in itself motivates Christine's violent reaction. But there is a deeper reason for it. As Ezra's words imply, the situation revives his father Abe's love for the beautiful young stranger Marie Brantome, a relationship of which Christine undoubtedly is well aware. But Ezra, too, loved Marie. She gave him the maternal tenderness his

own stern mother withheld from him ; and as the woman of his childhood, she incarnates a lost paradise to him. To him, as to Adam, Christine is a mother substitute ; their love for her is a love by proxy. Of these, too, Christine may intuitively be aware. Again the spirit of the dead woman is evoked.

The Ghost of Marie

Twice more the ghost of Marie is called forth. In Part II.II Orin tells Christine :

> And do you remember how you used to let me brush your hair and how I loved to ? He hated me doing that, too, you've still got the same beautiful hair, mother. That hasn't changed.

Identical Situations

Four identical situations are evoked here. There is Ezra's gesture the night preceding the murder two days earlier. There is Adam's concern with Christine's hair. There is the Orin-Christine relationship of the past. And there is Ezra's parallel relationship with Marie, which indicates that his hatred of Orin's hair-brushing is motivated by jealousy at a blissful mother-son relationship he had once enjoyed himself but which ended when Marie left him for his uncle, just as, later, Christine turned away from him to his son. Ezra's ghost now looms large beside that of Marie.

The Final Hair-Touching Scene

The final hair-touching scene occurs in Part III.III. Orin tells Lavinia :

> There are times now when you don't seem to be my sister, nor mother, but some stranger with the same beautiful hair—(He touches her hair caressingly. She pulls violently away. He laughs wildly.) Perhaps you're Marie Brantome, eh ?

Orin's words hark back to the initial Abe-Marie relationship. Again Mannon love for 'paganism' is inextricably connected with sin —adultery in Abe's case, incest in Orin's. The fated chain has come full circle ; the sin of the grandfather is visited upon the grandson. The scene also relates to the one between Ezra and Christine just dealt with, for Orin and Lavinia are now virtually identical with their parents. Like Ezra's love for Christine, Orin's love for Lavinia, his 'wife', is one by proxy, is a love for Márie or the other qualities she symbolizes.

Complex Psychological Pattern

The psychological pattern of the play has become ever more introverted and complex. From Abe's fairly simple preference of the mistress to the wife, actively dramatized, we have moved to Ezra's inner conflict between too much less contrasting figures: the 'mother' (Marie) and the wife. Finally we reach Orin's desperate struggle with his inner furies, his attempt to reincarnate the mistress and mother qualities associated with the two dead women in his sister, thereby combining the love, freedom and protection. Ironically, this ideal combination can only be found in an incestuous relationship, which is especially abhorred by the puritan part of Orin. It is hard to imagine a more crushing and inevitable fate than the psychological one O'Neill has designed for Orin.

Strange and Beautiful

The attentive reader has noticed how, in all the hair-touching scenes, two words are constantly repeated: "strange" and "beautiful". Verbal repetition thus is coordinated with the gestic one to bring out the "strange hidden identity" between the women and between the men. Moreover, both words are frequently used in connection with the Islands. When Lavinia towards the end talks about the "mysterious and beautiful" good spirit of love belonging to the Islands, she points also to what the hair of the women and the whole figure of Marie Brantome ultimately represent: the life-affirmation and love incarnate which oppose the spirit of hatred and death wish and therefore are worshipped by all the Mannons.

Q. 43. Examine Waith's comment that the typical O'Neill play is "an exercise in unmasking".

Or

Q. 44. "O'Neill's use of masks, as Falk and Waith have demonstrated in different ways, is no easy stunt." Examine with special reference to *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

Or

Q. 45. Bring out the symbolic significance of the use of masks in O'Neill's plays, particularly in *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

Or

Q. 46. Do you agree that nearly all O'Neill's protagonists wear a mask, hide their true selves from the world and from themselves?

Exercise in Unmasking

The idea underlying the device of using masks is not limited to mask plays proper. Figuratively speaking, nearly all O'Neill's protagonists wear a mask, hide their true selves from the world and from themselves. The dramatist's "dogma for the new masked drama"—"one's outer life passes in a solitude haunted by the masks of others; one's inner life passes in a solitude hounded by the masks of oneself—applies to a good deal of his non-mask plays as well. For, as Waith points out borrowing a phrase from the playwright himself, the typical O'Neill play is "an exercise in unmasking".

Mask as a Visual Idea

Even as a visual idea—our concern at present—the mask is old with O'Neill. In a number of plays the face of the characters are compared to masks in the stage directions. When this is done, the characters invariably find themselves in a state of fatalism or extreme grief.

Defensive Function of Mask

In other cases its defensive function is more pronounced. When Caleb is rejected by Emma (in *Diff'rent*) his face "sets in its concealment mask of emotionlessness", and thirty years later we still find the same mask-like expression on his face, belied only by his eyes, which "cannot conceal an inward struggle". Clearly, Caleb's mask-like expression visualizes not merely the grimness of his fate but also his attempt to cope with it, to harden himself against it. But to harden oneself is to die a little. Thus the "mask" designed to protect against disruptive emotions would lead to self-annihilation, substitutes death-in-life for death, slow destruction for an instantaneous one. Ephraim Cabot (in *Desire Under the Elms*), a stoic like Caleb, "hardens his face into a stony mask", when he learns from Abbie that the child she has just killed was not his but Eben's : and he explains the significance of facial change himself when thinking aloud : "I got t'be—like a stone—a rock o'jedgment ! ".

Use of Mask Implies Death

Wherever O'Neill employs the mask, there is a note of death. Emma Crossby (in *Diff'rent*) finally realizing that she has wasted her own life as well as Caleb's, "dies" before she takes her life : her face "is frozen into an expressionless mask, her eyes are red-rimmed, dull and lifeless."

The same holds true, generally, about O'Neill's masked characters. When dealing with the mask-face symbiosis, we should not think so much in terms of surface and depth of persona and shadow as in terms of conflicting impulses of death and life, hatred and love, pride and humility. The division is not merely psychological ; it is also ideological. The characteristic development of the O'Neill hero from pride to humility, from self love to love is not just a 'case study' ; it is a moral prescription, an act of exorcism.

The Genesis of the Masks

The genesis of the masks, as used by O'Neill in such plays as *Great God Brown, Mourning Becomes Electra* and *Days Without End*, may be described as follows :

> Before man discovered sin, while he still enjoyed primordial unity with the "old God"—Nature—there was no need for hiding, no need to wear 'masks'. When man was separated from nature the situation changed. Unable to return to his harmonious origin, unable likewise to accept his new, painful status, man became divided against himself, one part of him—the open, naive, romantic side—longing to return to the lost paradise, the other, rational part of him trying to adjust to the earthly hell. At times one side or other becomes so predominant that the total character is nearly fused with it.

Thus the Mannons are almost identified with the 'mask', whereas Marie and Christine are closely related to the 'face'. In Lavinia the two are fatefully balanced, as her circular development from 'mask' to 'face' and back to 'mask' illustrates.

Symbolism of Masks

On this symbolic level the characters can no longer be viewed as individuals ; instead they typify the two dispositions of the human soul just described. The marriage between Ezra and Christine, by the same token, becomes a symbol of the unhappy state of man ; her attempt to free herself from him equals man's attempt to free himself from his 'mask' ; and her love for Brant, so like the young Ezra, is an ironical illustration of man's inability to escape his 'mask'. The men, similarly, although they long to discard their 'masks' and revert to naked, primordial unity, find life too hard to bear without this protective armour ; not until they die, when life's hostility is no longer a threat to them, can they unmask themselves ? Moreover, as an alienating effect, the masks help the audience to see that the

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Q. 47. "The costumes of O'Neill's characters also have other connotations." Elaborate the above statement and support your answer with illustrations from *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

Or

Q. 48. Comment upon the following :

> **In *Electra* it is not surprising that all the major male characters wear uniforms since the play begins on the day the Civil War ends, but the uniforms have a significance beyond the realistic one.**

Elucidate.

Or

Q. 49. "The designs and colours of the costumes in *Mourning Becomes Electra* are symbolic." Discuss.

Or

Q. 50. Bring out the symbolism of the costumes in *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

Symbolism of Uniforms

The costumes of O'Neill's characters also have really other connotations. In *Mourning Becomes Electra* it is not surprising that all the major male characters wear uniforms since the play begins on the day the Civil War ends, but the uniforms have a significance beyond the realistic one. At an early point we learn that when Christine fell in love with Ezra "he was handsome in his lieutenant's uniform", and her youthful reaction is repeated in stage action when Lavinia enthusiastically greets Orin as he returns from the war, a first lieutenant and "a hero in blue". But Orin, as he himself surmises, is not a true hero ; brought up as his mother's baby, his Mannon characteristics have been repressed, and although his father has tried to make a "man" of him at the front, his uniform, upon his return home, is still "ill-fitting" and "baggy", without the splendour that characterized that of his father.

Suggestive Colours of Uniforms

Adam's uniform links him basically with the Mannon men, yet it differs significantly from those of Ezra and Orin. As a merchant captain's blue uniform it is "peaceful" and connected with the sea. Ultimately, his blue uniform proclaims his longing to return to his "Garden of Paradise", set in the blue of the sea.

When he first appears, however, Adam does not wear h uniform. Even so, the "foppish extravagance" of his costume lin

him with Christine, whose green satin dress is smartly cut and expensive. Both of them are set apart from the Mannons in their plain, severe clothes. Reminiscent of the coloured rags worn by the South Sea islanders, their costumes establish their sensual, life-affirming, pagan qualities as opposed to the Mannon asceticism. In Part I. III Christine still wears green, but she has changed from the enticing satin to velvet, a material more in agreement with Ezra's puritan notions and less likely to stir his sexual desire. There is a striking costume contrast at the beginning of this act :

> Lavinia, severely dressed in black, is seated on the steps in the bleak moonlight, while above and to the right of her stands Christine, the light from the hall glowing along the edges of the dress and in the colour of her hair.

At no other point in the trilogy is the contrast between life-affirming 'paganism' and life-denying puritanism so clearly visualized. The warm light outlining Christine's hair and body suggests the benevolent sun shining over the green Islands. Momentarily resembling the Dionysian Lazarus, radiant in the halo of his own glowing light, Christine takes on the majestic proportion of an Earth Mother, celebrating the values denied by her daughter.

Connotations of Lavinia's Black Dress

The black that Lavinia affects in the greater part of the trilogy has several connotations. There are perfectly commonplace reasons for it in the last two parts, where she mourns her father and brother respectively. But in the first part her choice of costume testifies rather to her spiteful jealousy and hatred of Christine. Throughout the play her black attire is linked with her father's judicial robe, visualized in the portrait in his study. She sternly condemns both her mother and brother to death, acting out her part as the devil's advocate in the mistaken belief that she is wielding justice. Above all, her blackness stands for puritan life denial. Commenting on the trilogy title O'Neill stated :

> In old sense of the word—it befits—it becomes Electra to mourn—it is her fate,—also, in usual sense (made ironical here), mourning (black) is becoming to her—it is the only color that becomes her destiny.

The ultimate reason why mourning becomes Lavinia is simply that she never wanted to be born. This explains the intensity of her hatred for her mother, the person who brought her into this miserable world, the world she renounces at the end, when she decides to spend the rest of her life inside the Mannon "temple of Hate and Death".

Orin's Black Suit

Orin, too, visualizes the father-judge in the third part. Hunted by the Furies—his guilt-ridden conscience—he appears in a black suit. The black suit at once reveals that the South Sea has had no liberating effect on him. Seated below the portrait of the forty-year-old judge, dominated by the father puritan spirit, he now appoints himself the judge of the family, recording their crimes from the initial one of the grandfather down to his own and Lavinia's.

Lavinia's Green Costume

If Orin is now his father, Lavinia, in the greater part of *The Haunted* is her mother. In the scene with her lover, Peter, she appears in a green satin dress. In the scene with her puritan 'husband' and 'son', Orin, she dresses in the maternal velvet gown. It was in California—where Adam had been—that Lavinia discarded her mourning and bought new clothes in her mother's colour. The change of costume occurred after she had met Wilkins, ship's officer reminding her of Adam. Her green costume thus advertizes her unconscious love for Adam or for the life-affirming spirit in him, the spirit she later recognizes in Wilkins, in Avahanni, and in all the natives of the green Islands.

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Chronology of Important Dates

1888	Eugene Gladstone O'Neill born to Ellen Quinlan and James O'Neill on October 16, in New York city.
1895-1900	To Mount Saint Vincent, Catholic boarding school.
1902-06	To Betts Academy, Stamford, Connecticut.
1906-07	To Princeton University.
1909	Married Kathleen Jenkins (divorced 1912) ; one son—Eugene O'Neill, Jr.
1909	Went prospecting for gold in Honduras. At sea for two years.
1909	Lived in a waterfront dive, "Jimmy-the-Priest's", which became the locale for *Anna Christie* and *The Iceman Cometh.*
1911	Sailor and beachcomber.
1912	Joined *New London Telegraph* in August as a reporter. Stayed four months. More interested in writing verse than gathering news.
1912	Just before Christmas developed mild case of tuberculosis. Spent five months at the Gaylord Farm Sanatorium at Wallingford, Conn. Took to reading Strindberg and the Greek tragic poets.
1912-13	Convalescence from tuberculosis. During this period he wrote eleven one-act and two long plays. He tore up all but six of the one-acters.

1914	James O'Neill paid for the publication of five of these plays under the title—*Thirst and Other One-Act Plays.*
1914-15	Attended George Pierce Baker's "Workshop 47" at Harvard University.
1916	Moved to Provincetown, Mass.
1916	*Bound East for Cardiff* (one-act play). Produced by the Provincetown Players at Wharf Theatre, Provincetown, Mass.
1916	*Thirst* (one-act play).
1916	*Before Breakfast* (a dramatic monologue in one act). Produced by the Provincetown players at the Playwright's Theatre (popularly known as the Provincetown) in Greenwich village, New York city, on December 1.
1917	*Fog* (one-act play). Produced by the Provincetown Players, on January 5.
1917	*The Sniper* (one-act play). Produced by the Provincetown Players, on February 16.
1917	*In the Zone* (one-act play). Produced by the Washington Square Players, on October 31.
1917	*The Long Voyage Home* (one-act play). Produced by the Provincetown Players, on November 2.
1917	*Ile* (one-act play). Produced by the Provincetown Players, on November 30.
1918	Married Agnes Boulton (divorced 1929); two children—Shane and Oona (Mrs. Charles Chaplin). Moved to Cape Code, occupying a former Coast Guard Station.

1918 *The Rope* (one-act play). Produced by the Provincetown Players, on April 26.

1918 *Where the Cross is Made* (one-act play). Produced by the Provincetown Players, on November 22.

1918 *The Moon of the Caribbees* (one-act play). Produced by the Provincetown Players, on December 20.

1919 *The Dreamy Kid* (one-act play). Produced by the Provincetown Players, on October 31.

1920 *Beyond the Horizon.* Produced by John D. Williams at the Morosco Theatre, on February 2. First Pulitzer Prize.

1920 *Chris Christopherson* (First version of *Anna Christie*). Produced by George C. Tyler in Atlantic City, on March 8.

1920 *Exorcism* (one-act play). Produced by the Provincetown Players, on March 26.

1920 *The Emperor Jones.* Produced by the Provincetown Players, on November 3.

1920 *Diff'rent.* Produced by the Provincetown Players, on December 27.

1920 Father, James O'Neill, died in August.

1921 *Gold.* Produced by John D. Williams at the Frazee Theatre, on June 1.

1921 *Anna Christie.* Produced by Arthur Hopkins at the Vanderbilt Theatre, on November 2. Second Pulitzer Prize.

1921 *The Straw.* Produced by, George C. Tyler at the Greenwich Village Theatre, on November 10.

1922 *The First Man.* Produced at the Neighbourhood Playhouse, on March 4.

1922 *The Hairy Ape.* Produced by the Provincetown Players, on March 9.

1922 Mother, Ellen Quinlan O'Neill, died.

1924 *Welded.* Produced by Macgowan, Jones, and O'Neill in association with the Selwyns at the 39th St. Theatre, on March 17.

1924 *The Ancient Mariner* (from the poem by Coleridge). Produced by the Provincetown Playhouse, Inc., on April 6.

1924 *All God's Chillun Got Wings.* Produced by the Provincetown Playhouse, Inc., on May 15.

1924 *S. S. Glencairn* (a sequence of the early sea-pieces). Produced at Provincetown, Mass. on August 14. Revived on January 12, 1925, by Macgowan, Jones and O'Neill in New York.

1924 *Desire Under the Elms.* Produced by the Provincetown Players, Inc. at the Greenwich Village Theatre, on November 11.

1925 *The Fountain.* Produced by Macgowan, Jones, and O'Neill in association with A. L. Jones and Morris Green at the Greenwich Village Theatre, on December 10.

1926 *The Great God Brown.* Produced by Macgowan, Jones, and O'Neill at the Greenwich Village Theatre, on January 23.

1926 Honorary Litt. D. from Yale University.

1928 *Marco Millions.* Produced by the Theatre Guild, on January 9.

1928 *Strange Interlude.* Produced by the Theatre Guild, on January 30.

1928 *Lazarus Laughed.* Produced by the Pasadena Community Playhouse, Pasadena, Calif., on April 9.

1929 *Dynamo.* Produced by the Theatre Guild at the Martin Beck Theatre, on February 11.

1929 Married Carlotta Monterey, on July 22.

1931 *Mourning Becomes Electra.* Produced by the Theatre Guild, on October 26.

1933 *Ah, Wilderness!* Produced by the Theatre Guild, on October 2.

1934 *Days Without End.* Produced by the Theatre Guild, on January 8.

1936 Nobel Prize for Literature.

1946 *The Iceman Cometh.* Produced by the Theatre Guild, on September 2. (Revived under Jose Quintero's direction, on May 8, 1958).

1947 Stricken with Parkinson's disease.

1947 *A Moon for the Misbegotten.* Produced by the Theatre Guild, on February 20, but later withdrawn.

1953 Died on November 27.

1955 *Long Day's Journey Into Night.* World premiere at the Royal Dramatic Theatre, Stockholm, on February 10.

1956 Broadway opening of *Long Day's Journey Into Night,* on November 7.

1957 Broadway opening of *A Moon for the Misbegotten,* on May 2. Pulitzer Prize awarded posthumously for *Long Day's Journey Into Night.*

1958 World premiere of *A Touch of the Poet* at the Royal Dramatic Theatre, Stockholm, on March 29. Broadway premiere on October 12.

1962 World premiere of an adaptation of *More Stately Mansions* at the Royal Dramatic Theatre, Stockholm, on October 9.

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Long Day's Journey Into Night

Themes, Philosophy, Symbolism

By common consent, *Long Day's Journey into Night* is regarded as O'Neill's masterpiece. It is a play of great power and superb craftsmanship. Choicest epithets and superlatives have been showered on this 'lacerating round-robin of recrimination, self-dramatization and torture.' Critics are one in according this play unqualified praise of a very high order.

Discussing the themes, philosophy and symbolism of the play, Sophus Keith Winther observes :

"In its development the play revolves around four dominant themes : the father, the mother, the home, and the poet-dramatist's basic philosophy. It is not only as vivid persons and themes that they are significant, but as central and universal concepts which generalize fact and lead us into the fog-shrouded world of misdirected energy. The facts of the play move us to pity, but it is the understanding of the complex and inescapable web of nature that deepens pity into a sense of tragedy which transcends the cruel miserliness of the father, the hopeless pathos of the mother, and the physical decay of the brother into a life-meaning conceived by O'Neill. The play is the story of man and his sorry world of boastful achievement and inward despair.

"In his treatment of the father, O'Neill presents the basic psychological conflict developed in so many of his plays that without it the essential tragedy of his work would be gone. Love manifests itself in hate and hate leads to a sense of inward defeat that can be stilled only by some form of self-destruction. The father represents the life force corrupted into death, and the death wish takes over with a compelling force which clothes all the action in futility and despair.

"The father in *Long Day's Journey* points up with dramatic clarity the same theme in most if not all of O'Neill's great plays. From *Anna Christie* to *Strange Interlude* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*, the father, who is the source of life, becomes a force for evil. Through this subconscious perversion of conscious desire, life, in seeking to perpetuate the ideal, effects its destruction. The tragic character in O'Neill's plays needs no outward stature of position or power because he is the symbol of an inward struggle familiar in life and in art from ancient times to the present day.

"*Long Day's Journey* presents James Tyrone as the father whose virtues destroy him and all that he loves. He was a great actor, capable of equalling Booth, who once said of Tyrone that 'He is playing Othello better than I ever did.' He sold his ideal as an actor for the profits of a cheap show. His great ability overcame the physical poverty of his youth, but the inward sense of insecurity made him a miser who destroyed the respect and love of his wife and sons.

"Tyrone's wife Mary accuses him of depriving her of the one thing she needed for her children, a home. He spent thousands of dollars on get-rich-quick schemes, but would not give her the one thing she wanted. She says, 'He thinks money spent on a home is money wasted......He doesn't understand a home. He doesn't feel at home in it.' He forced her to go on the road with him, riding in dirty trains, staying in cheap hotel rooms where night after night she waited for him to return staggering drunk after the last bar had closed. Mary reminds him that while still on their honeymoon 'I waited in that ly hotel room hour after hour......I became terrified. I imagined all sorts of horrible accidents. I got on my knees and prayed that nothing had happened to you'. Finally his friends carried

him dead drunk to the door of his room. There she found him. She continues 'I didn't know how often that was to happen in the years to come.'

"Edmund takes up the same theme when he accuses his father of being responsible for his mother's dope habit. 'You've never given her anything that would help her to stay off it! No home except this summer dump in a place she hates......... You've dragged her on the road, season after season, on one-night stands, with no one she could talk to, waiting night after night in dirty hotel rooms for you to come back with a bun on after the bars closed. Christ, is it any wonder she didn't want to be cured? Jesus, when I think of it, I hate your guts.'

"The long illness that followed Edmund's birth finally led to the dope habit because James would not pay for a good doctor. He always sought out the cheapest quacks who knew nothing except how to ease the patients' pain by giving them dope. The pain ended but the habit remained and with it came an overwhelming sense of guilt.

"The death of a son was also charged to the father. Tyrone forced his wife to leave the child in the care of a nurse so he could have her with him on the road. Beneath the outward will to have her with him was the subconscious hatred of his own children as rivals for his love. 'He's been jealous of every one of my babies. He kept finding ways of making me leave them.'

"After Edmund's birth, her hands, once slender and beautiful, became gnarled and crooked. 'My hands' she says, are 'maimed and crippled'. For that as for all her ills the quack doctors had only one remedy, dope. She says of the doctor who is treating Edmund, 'We all know why you like him, James. Because he's cheap.' Later she continues 'I hate doctors! ......They'll sell their souls! What's worse, they'll sell yours, and you never know it till one day you find yourself in hell.' To her mind this seemed a literal truth, for once when the doctor, evidently afraid of what he had done, withheld the dope from her, she, in despair, attempted suicide.

"The sons hated and despised their father for his miserliness. Edmund tells his father 'I've tried to feel like Mamma that you

can't help being what you are where money is concerned. But God Almighty this last stunt of yours is too much. It makes me want to puke......To think when it's a question of your son having consumption you can show yourself up before the whole town as such a stinking old tightwad......I won't go to any damned state farm just to save you a few lousy dollars...... You stinking old miser.' And again Edmund says, 'You think I'm going to die......So why waste money ?'

"Although at that time James was worth a quarter of a million dollars, he cried poverty to the doctors and state officials to try to get his son into a state sanatorium.

"Perhaps Edmund's brother Jamie had the bitterest comment on that issue. He consoled Edmund with the words 'He'll give you a case of booze to take with you to the state farm for pauper patients. The sooner you kick the bucket, the less expense. What a bastard to have for a father.'

"Tyrone's sons despised him for having sold out his genius for an easy fortune in a cheap play. They scoffed at his religious fervour which manifested itself in ritual and nothing else. They mocked his continual mouthing of Catholic faith combined with his rebukes for their faithlessness. Perhaps the play represents their deepest contempt for him when they taunted him for believing that Shakespeare was an Irish Catholic. That seemed to measure most perfectly for them the depth of his ignorance.

"Still the father is no villain in the traditional sense. He is as much a victim of his own nature as are all the members of his family. He cannot dominate the forces from within any more than he can control the outward acts that destroy his family. He is hated but he is also loved. There is no way of living happily with him, and no way at all to escape from him. The road to his castle is choked with debris, all roads out are enveloped in dense fog ; the father differs from Strindberg's *Father* in outward circumstances, but the inward labyrinth of despair, is similar. That is exactly the way O'Neill wanted it, for he believed Strindberg's dramas were supreme in their analysis of man's eternal psychological conflicts.

"The second symbol around which the tragedy of the Tyrone family centres is the home. Here again one recognizes that the theme is generalized as it is in O'Neill's plays from *The Long Voyage Home* through all of his major tragedies. In one sense *Long Day's Journey Into Night* is a title for all his tragedies, and the journey into night takes place in a home which is a symbol for man's physical and spiritual shelter, but a symbol which here wears the ironic mask of failure and death.

"What happened to O'Neill's mother happened to him. In his youth he fled from his home and his father; all the mature years of his life were devoted to a search for a home. From New York to France, to Sea Island, Georgia to California, back to New York, and finally to Marblehead Neck, Massachusetts, he searched for a home. He built three beautiful houses, yet each became a haunted castle, something to escape from in the hope of finding the peace of mind that the right home can give. He never found it but he did find that his mother's tragedy was the same as his; they both lost their way in the search for a home. His beautiful houses were no more to him than was his mother's ugly one. The search defeated her, driving her to madness; the search for him developed the ironic philosophy which he turned into dramatic art.

"It is the dramatist as much as it is the mother who cries out in anguish against the ugliness of the home he lives in. In its barrenness it symbolizes the emptiness of life. For the mother it is the source of all the ruin that envelops her. She knows her eldest son is a no-good drunkard, that Edmund is a disciple of his brother Jamie and morally as great a failure. Both sons are discreputable characters in their home town, the place where the family lives in the summer. Edmund's mother says to him 'No respectable parents will let their daughter be seen with you.' But when her husband condemns Jamie, she defends him by saying 'If he'd been brought up in a real home, I'm sure he would have been different.'

"At another time she says 'Children should have homes to be born in, if they are to be good children, and women need homes

if they are to be good mothers. Her spirit is burdened with a sense of helplessness, because she has no place from which she can deal with her sons or calm her own turbulent spirit. There are no friends she can visit, no one she can talk to, no one wants her because she has never had a home where she could have friends come to visit her.

"The house in Connecticut was a shelter for her husband, a place he could come to every summer, where he could keep his family for the least expense. But it was not a home, because that is not what he wanted. Mary tells him, "It was never a home. You always preferred the club or barroom. And for me it's always been as lonely as a dirty room in a one-night-stand hotel. In a real home one is never lonely.

"This house was her prison. 'I've always hated this town and everything in it......I never wanted to live here, she says. "If there were only some place I could go to get away for a day or even an afternoon, some woman friend I could talk to...... I am alone. I've always been alone. And this is the burden of all her most rational conversation as it movas slowly and inevitably nearer to the mind-darkening world of dope-created illusions. At times she makes desperate efforts to grasp reality, but always the reality fades away. She falls into mental darkness, clutching the illusion of a home as a penitent sinner might cling to a symbol of the Cross.

"Every misfortune of her life Mary blames on the fact that she never had a home. When she moved away from her father's house she began the downward journey into the regions of the lost ones of this world. First it was the dirt and loneliness of cheap hotel rooms, then the sense of futility in bringing up her children, the death of her second child, the sickness following the birth of her third, and finally, the terrible decision that had to be made every fall—whether to take her children with her on the road or leave them in the care of a nurse. In the end she lost her health, she lost one child to death, the other two to a world that revolted her, and she lost her faith. In despair she cries, 'If I could only find the faith I lost, so I could pray again.'

"There was nothing about the cold, featureles shell, cheaply furnished, poorly lighted house in an unfriendly community that pleased Mary Tyrone or gave her a moment's peace of mind except the fog that closed in on her world evening after evening. There were times when she liked that. 'It hides you from the world and the world from you. You feel that everything has changed, and nothing is what it seems to be. No one can find or touch you any more.'

"In the final scene Mary comes in carrying her wedding gown, exquisitely beautiful, and which she had saved in the hope that some day she would have a daughter who would wear it and be glad to have a gown so lovely, because the daughter would know that her father would want something cheap. The gown is her last remembrance of her real home, symbolic of the bride she had once hoped to be. And something else. 'What is it I'm looking for ? I know it's something I lost.' She recalls her desire to be a nun, her return from the convent to her father's home. Then come the final words of the play : 'That was in the winter of my senior year. Then in the spring something happened to me. Yes, I remember. I fell in love with James Tyrone and was so happy for a time.'

"The total meaning of the play is woven into the theme of the lost home, and the home that was never found. It stands as one of the major influences upon the life and total philosophy of the dramatist. The home lost is not only the physical shelter for man, but the spiritual shelter as well. Both were lost. For the mother the result was a disillusionment so profound that dope and madness were the result. O'Neill's defence against this loss was an ironic scorn for the pitiful illusions, the endless pipe-dreams by which man tries to live.

"The web that holds the human spirit in bondage is the essence of plot. In *Long Day's Journey* O'Neill makes his web visible in every act. It appears first of all to the eye of the observer in the stage set. It is, at first glance, a small book case, but its contents reveal the stuff out of which the dramatist created his philosophy of man and the world. The book case contains novels by Stendhal and Zola, philosophical works by

Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, plays by Ibsen and Strindberg, and poetry of Swinburne. Baudelaire, Rossetti, Wilde, Ernest Dowson and Kipling.

"O'Neill wanted the audience to know the names of the authors who had influenced him. They were his companions through life. They were on the book shelves in his bedroom in his last house; and it is quite certain they were in his mind as he faced death. They continue after his death to provide an ideological frame of reference within which the tragic action of his plays moves.

"In his other plays O'Neill often introduces quotations from other writers, but in none so often as in *Long Day's Journey*, for in this play he deals with himself, his background, the sources of his ideas and concepts of life. His father accuses him of holding Nietzsche as his pet. In his early years as a playwright he carried a copy of *The Birth of Tragedy* with him constantly. It was the Dionysian view of art more than the Apollonian that appealed to him. Tragedy is born out of Dionysus and for O'Neill the supreme utterance is that of Sophocles 'It were better never to have been born.' This idea O'Neill coupled to the grim logic of Euripides scorning the idea of immortality, for who in his right senses would prolong the agony of life beyond the promised peace of death ?

"Speaking of Edmund, his mother says 'I should never have borne him. It would have been better for his sake.' And on this subject Edmund was in complete agreement with his mother. 'It was a great mistake; my being born a man .....I will always be a stranger who never feels at home, who does not really want and is not really wanted, who can never belong, who must always be a little in love with death.'

"In the play, Edmund offers no explanation and no excuse for what he is except the most convincing of all—that there is no answer to the question other than that of time and circumstance which equals the impossibility of finding happiness in a world that is out of harmony with man's desires. When Edmund's father tries to excuse his son's behaviour on the

grounds that it, 'was a game of romance for you', Edmund makes a direct reference to his attempted suicide. 'Yes, particularly the time I tried to commit suicide at Jimmie the Priest's, and almost did.'

'You were drunk', says his father.

'I was stone cold sober. That was the trouble. I'd stopped to think too long.'

"Nothing could sum up O'Neill's view of life better or more to the point than that. He held to it consistently and with a determination that he recognized as part of his character. His father says of Edmund, 'His quietness fools people into thinking they can do what they like with him. But he's stubborn as hell inside, and what he does is what he wants to do, and to hell with anyone else.'

"It was this determination to be himself that made for his success as a dramatist. 'Whatever I write', says Edmund, 'it will be faithful realism.' And so it was, with no small emphasis on the faithful. More than once O'Neill has said that it was his father's failure to be faithful to his art that made the son determine never to sell out.

"Only once did he do a play in which the grim shadows and ever-present fogs were gone. When someone asked him if *Ah, Wilderness !* was drawn from his own life he replied, 'That was what I hoped it would be, but it was not.' There was no light touch, no gay, light-hearted romance for him. The fates who ruled over the life of Oedipus were no less implacable than the sinister forces that guided O'Neill.

"In *Long Day's Journey into Night* O'Neill recognizes mystical moments of escape from reality as part of his experience. He writes of a 'Full moon in the Trades. The old hooker driving fourteen knots. I lay on the bowsprit, facing astern, with the water foaming into spume under me, the masts with every sail white in the moonlight, towering over me. I became drunk with the beauty and singing rhythm of it, and for a moment I lost myself—actually lost my life. I was set free !

I dissolved into the sea, became moonlight and the ship and the high dim-starred sky ! I belonged without past or future, within peace and unity and a wild joy, within something greater than my own life, or the life of Man, or to Life itself. To God if you want to put it that way.'

"But when it was all over Edmund summarizes it this way, 'For a second there is meaning ! Then the hand lets the veil fall and you are alone, lost in the fog again, and you stumble on towards nowhere, for no good reason !"

"So the bright moment fades into the fog. No other symbol for man's dark adventure in this world is more aften used than the fog. In *Long Day's Journey into Night* alone there are approximately thirty references to the fog and in most of them the symbolism is emphasized. It blurs the world and hides you from it. Each character in turn damns the fog while at the same time he longs for the shelter it gives.

"The play opens in morning sunshine remarkable because of the absence of fog. Before the afternoon is far advanced the mournful song of the fog-horn drifts into the scene. As the fog outside grows more dense so does the fearful fog of madness settle over the mind of Mary. It is an omen of evil recognized by the servant who likens the sound of the fog-horn to a banshee. Mary remarks, 'It's very dreary and sad here alone in the fog with night falling.' Everything for her is sad and lost, as she notices that the fog is so thick that 'All the people of the world could pass by and I would never know.'

"To Edmund his mother's sinking into madness is 'Like a bank of fog in which she hides and loses herself." This is an easy and natural simile for Edmund to use. He reflects on it many times as a symbol of his own relation to the world. Perhaps his most convincing comment is in connection with his desire to escape from the world. 'The fog was where I wanted to be... Nothing was what it is. That's what I wanted—to be alone with myself in another world where truth is untrue and life can hide from itself...It was like walking on the bottom of

the sea... As if I was a ghost belonging to the fog... It felt damn peaceful to be nothing more than a ghost within a ghost.'

"O'Neill was the haunted and bitter hero of his own tragedy in *Long Day's Journey*. His whole life was given to the search for meaning in meaningless chaos of the world. Larry, in *The Iceman Cometh* sums up O'Neill's final comment. 'Before me is the comforting fact that death is a fine long sleep, and I'm damned tired, and it can't come too soon for me.'

"This strange blending of neo-romanticism with naturalism would seem to imply either a conflict in the mind of O'Neill or a confusion of philosophic thought. Actually he blends the romantic by giving it the sardonic turn of Baudelaire and fusing it with the naturalism of Zola, and between these extremes he follows the ironic pattern of Stendhal. Out of these extremes he spins the unified web of thought which envelops all the characters in his plays. Their virtues lead to their own destruction. Their vision is lost in the fog that shrouds their ideals and their world.

"*Long Day's Journey into Night*" combines in one action great themes O'Neill developed in all his tragedies. Each the. deserves detailed analysis, a study that can now be made with greater assurance than before the publication of his last great play. He has revealed the father, the home, and the sources of his philosophy in one dramatic action which embraces the meaning of all his plays and unites us to him in the universal tragedy of man." [1]

Autobiographical Element

Frederic Carpenter says about the play that 'By the very perfection of its artistic verisimilitude it emphasized the problem of the relationship of biographic fact to artistic fiction.' He then asks the question : 'How is life transmuted into art by the alembic of imagination ?' In his answer to this question he

1. S. K. Winther, *O'Neill's Tragic Themes* : *Long Day's Journey into Night*, *ARIZONA QUARTERLY*, 13, 4 (Winter, 1957), pp. 295-307.

closely scrutinizes the facts of O'Neill's life and compares them with their treatment in *Long Day's Journey*. He writes :

"The central problem upon which the interpretation of *Long Day's Journey* turns is that of the character and relationship of James and Mary Tyrone, who closely correspond to the actual James and Ellen (or Ella) O'Neill, Eugene's father and mother. The play develops their characters and relationship dramatically, and realistically.

"Like the actual James O'Neill, James Tyrone is the son of an Irish immigrant who deserted his wife when the boy was ten to return to Ireland. Like James O'Neill, James Tyrone was forced to work continuously as a boy. This childhood experience bred in him an exaggerated consciousness of the importance of money, which (in the play) is the root of all evil. And James Tyrone, like James O'Neill, continued to work hard, became a successful actor, and soon rose to the top of his profession As he tells his son (with exact names and dates taken from James O'Neill's actual career), he acted Shakespeare with Edwin Booth, who testified : 'That young man is playing Othello better than I ever did !' But then Tyrone says : 'I married your mother,' and needed even more money. Soon after this he achieved such great financial success as the hero of a romantic melodrama (exactly as James O'Neill did in *Monte Cristo*), that he gave up serious acting and spent the rest of his professional career making money ('from thirty-five to forty thousand net profit a season !'). Thus James Tyrone prostituted his artistic career to money-making, and lost his own self respect. The tragedy of *Long Day's Journey*, therefore, is motivated in part by James Tyrone's miserliness and materialism. And these biographical facts almost exactly correspond to those of Eugene's father, James O'Neill.

"But James Tyrone's miserliness is exaggerated far beyond the actual facts of James O'Neill's actual life. The fictional Tyrone is accused of two cardinal sins in his relationship with his wife. Most important, he is said to have hired a 'cheap quack' of a doctor to care for her when their youngest son,

Edmund (the actual Eugene), was born. And this fictional quack is said to have prescribed the morphine which started the mother's tragic addiction to dope. And even before this, Tyrone is said to have forced his wife to live in a cheap house in New London, which so humiliated her that she could never feel it was 'a home' : 'I'd never felt it was my home. It was wrong from the start. Everything was done the cheapest way.'

"But these two fictional acts of Tyrone's life were so exaggerated that they seem almost the opposite of the actual truth. Although the actual James O'Neill was often miserly by habit, he loved and idolized his wife so greatly that he often spent more on her than he could afford. It was precisely in order to support his wife in the manner to which she had become accustomed (her father had been a successful businessman), that James O'Neill prostituted his artistic career to achieve spectacular financial success. Truth is often stranger, and more complex, than fiction.

"In fact James O'Neill had always been extremely sensitive to the problems of his young bride, who, as the wife of a travelling actor, could seldom live long in any one place. This sensitiveness had been intensified when their second son had died in infancy (just as did the second son of the fictional Tyrones) while the parents were absent together 'on the road'. Therefore, in order to provide his wife a permanent 'home', James O'Neill had built an expensive house for Ellen 'of the finest materials......The Boston *Times* reported that the house had cost $ 40,000—a fortune in 1883.' Moreover, he had built it in New London, where many of his wife's relatives lived. If Ellen O'Neill could never feel that this was 'home', the fault was not his.

"The truth of the charge that the father's miserliness in hiring 'cheap quacks' had caused the mother's addiction to morphine is more uncertain. After (more than) eighty years it is impossible to determine just what caused it, but two facts are clear. At that time even the best doctors were not fully aware of the habit-forming dangers of the drug. And, either just before, or years after Eugene's actual birth (biographers

do not agree), his mother was operated on for cancer of the breast: James O'Neill took her to the most famous specialists in Europe, where the operation was successfully performed. Ellen O'Neill had been sick near the time of Eugene's birth, and she suffered from dope addiction years after; but it is doubtful that either his father's miserliness or his own birth was the actual cause. Probably Eugene himself never knew the true facts of his mother's tragedy and of his own 'misbegetting'. And surely his autobiographical drama describes the psychological truth as he believed it. But dramatic fiction and biographical fact remain far apart.

"The facts of O'Neill's actual biography and the fictions of *Long Day's Journey* approach one another somewhat more closely in the relationship of the young Eugene (named Edmund in the play) and his father. Again, miserliness is the issue, and in the play James Tyrone is described as planning, in order to save money, to send his sick son to 'a state farm' for the treatment of his tuberculosis. Actually, Eugene spent six months in an excellent private sanitarium, 'Gaylord Farm', where his tuberculosis was cured. But it is also true that Eugene was actually sent to the 'Fairfield Country State Tuberculosis Sanitarium' for two days before being transferred to this private sanitarium. The confused reasons are not known, but the relationship of James O'Neill with his son Eugene was—both in fact and in fiction—ambivalent.

"Again, the truth was more complicated than the fiction. Although James O'Neill, like James Tyrone, was often miserly, he only shared the common experiences and attitudes of his generation, and of the American immigrant past. In 1912 thrift was a cardinal American virtue, but a generation later thrift sometimes seemed like miserliness. And even more important, James O'Neill, in his relationship with Eugene, faced the difficult problem of bringing up the 'poor little rich boy.' His older son Jamie had, indeed, become completely spoiled. And throughout Eugene's youth the father sought to limit the son's spending money and to discipline his wasteful habits in order to teach him the value of hard work. But the young Eugene, in his turn, saw only that his father had lots of money

and that there was no need for him to work. Theirs was the universal conflict of two generations and of the different *mores* appropriate to each.

"Beyond this conflict, however, loomed that of the artist with the philistine—a conflict limited to no one time or country. James O'Neill believed that his sons should work for their living, and in Jamie's case he was right—his failure lay in not enforcing his belief. But Eugene, the future artist, was to work for a living with his imagination and, therefore, the future artist felt outraged at his father's insistence that he should work physically to earn money. But his father believed in hard work and in success. Only after Eugene became successful and won the Pulitzer Prize shortly before his father's death did the two become happily reconciled. Since this final reconciliation between father and son provides the dramatic resolution of the tragedy of *Long Day's Journey*, it is true to the spirit—but not to the letter—of biographical fact.

"The fictional mother of *Long Day's Journey*, Mary Tyrone, is probably closer to actuality than is any other character. Ellen Quinlan O'Neill had been brought up in the genteel, Victorian tradition of the late nineteenth century. A convent reared girl, she was beautiful, innocent, romantic, and utterly unworldly. In fact, she was the exact opposite of her future husband, who had been bred in the school of hard knocks, was experienced, practical, successful, and very sophisticated. Ellen Quinlan's extreme idealization, both of her future husband and of life in general, partly inspired both the artistic tragedy of Eugene O'Neill and the actual tragedies of her own life and of her sons.

"When Ellen Quinlan married James O'Neill, she expected the impossible, and—in so far as her husband was able to provide it by conscious effort—she got it. At the time of her marriage (to a man eleven years her senior), she knew that her future husband had lived with an actress and that there was talk of an illegitimate son; that he belonged utterly to the world of the theatre, of whose morals most respectable people (including her mother) disapproved, and that his profession inevitably

required constant travelling and homelessness. But the fictional 'Count of Monte Cristo' was able to escape from his dungeon and to conquer the world every matinee and evening, and James O'Neill *was* 'the Count of Monte Cristo.'

"After their marriage James always did his best to protect his wife from the roughness of the theatre (he forbade swearing and loose talk in her presence); he shielded her as best he could from the scandal of a paternity suit (once he had grown rich, he was a fair target); he remained perfectly faithful to his marriage vows throughout his life (Mary Tyrone remembers : 'In all those thirty-six years, there has never been a breath of scandal about him. I mean with any other woman'); he provided generously for her comfort and security, in so far as money could provide; he tried to build her a 'home'; and he even gave up the theatre during several periods to care for her.

"But he could not escape from his own past, he could not change the conditions of his chosen profession, and he could not prevent those tragedies common to all men—such as the death of his second son. Finally, he could not wholly change himself. Although he loved only his wife among all women, he continued to love sociability and the whisky that went with it; sometimes he drank too much, and failed to come home for dinner. But by all ordinary standards, the marriage of James and Ellen O'Neill was successful, and should not have resulted in tragedy—either in actuality or in fiction, why, then, the tragedy ?"[2]

As an American Tragedy : Cultural Alienation

In answer to the last question, Carpenter examines *Long Day's Journey* as an American tragedy. He writes :

" 'None of us can help the things life has done to us. They're done before you realize it and once they're done they make you do other things until at last everything comes between you and what you'd like to be, and you've lost your true self forever'

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2. Carpenter, pp. 20-24.

This speech by Mary Tyrone describes in colloquial terms the philosophy which O'Neill affirmed all his life and which he particularly embodied in *Long Day's Journey*. Although the four characters of the autobiographical drama seem to wound and to destroy one another by their constant bickerings and conflicts, their true tragedy is caused, rather, by what 'life' has done to them—by the unseen forces of their heredity and environment. And these unseen forces may also be said to have caused the actual tragedy of Eugene O'Neill. Not his flamboyant and sometimes parsimonious father, nor his gentle and defeated mother, nor his rebellious and profligate brother caused his tragic agony. The cause lay, rather, in their common heritage as Irish Catholic immigrants to an alien land, and in the conditions of life which the father's theatrical profession imposed upon them all.

" 'My poor mother washed and scrubbed for the Yanks by the day', James Tyrone remembers. And the feeling of social inferiority which this experience recalled, as well as the feeling of national antagonism suggested by the phrase 'the Yanks', echoes through all of O'Neill's life and plays. Meanwhile, the two Tyrone brothers sneeringly call their father 'The Beautiful Voice'. And although the mother pretends to defend him, she constantly harps upon the homelessness which his profession has forced upon them. Because Eugene was born the son of an Irish immigrant and because he was brought up in the homeless world of the theatre, his life seemed destined for tragedy. In *The Hairy Ape*, O'Neill completely sympathized with Yank, who could never 'belong' to American society and who embodied the psychology of the eternal outsider—of Irishman and Negro alike.

"But his father, James O'Neill, had done his best to escape his Irish heritage. In order to achieve success as an actor, he had consciously suppressed his Irish brogue. Ridiculed for his country manners and his Irish accent, he had tried to make himself over into an American gentleman. And he had become universally loved and admired in the world of the theatre to which he 'belonged'. Nevertheless, as *Long Day's Journey* suggests, he and his wife had never been fully accepted by the

class-conscious society of New London. And the sensitive young playwright became acutely conscious of this rejection.

"The experience of Irishness common to all the O'Neills and the feeling of alienation that went with it were typical of twentieth century America—but comparatively rare in the earlier America of Emerson and Whitman's time. By 1900 the 'Yankee' society of New England had crystallized into a self-conscious, middle-class culture to which the later immigrants felt themselves alien. Their social inferiority and their cultural alienation have been described by modern novelists such as Dreiser and James T. Farrell, as well as by O'Neill. Indeed, much of the tragic spirit of modern American literature, with its emphatic rejection of the earlier optimism, may have sprung from this feeling of cultural alienation. In 1800, all Americans were immigrants from an old England to a new England. But in 1900 the new immigrants to an established America came from alien lands and spoke with foreign accents. O'Neill chronicled the tragedies of Chris and Anna Christopherson, of Brutus 'the Emperor' Jones, and of Jim 'Crow' Harris, as well as those of James and Edmund Tyrone.

"But these Irish who came to America around the turn of the century were no ordinary immigrants. For Irishmen had long been aliens and outsiders even in their own ancestral home in the 'British' Isles. They had always opposed the authority and the society of their English overlords. As John Henry Raleigh has phrased it, they had suffered from a 'Judas complex'. Just as James and Eugene O'Neill sought to overcome the hostile and philistine society of the new world by means of histrionic art and dramatic imagination so the Irish had always sought to overcome their English conquerors. It is no accident that Eugene O'Neill's dramas have been most highly praised by Irishmen, such as Synge and Yeats, but have been most violently attacked by conservative British critics.

"Added to Eugene's heritage as the son of an Irish immigrant was his heritage of the theatre. Indeed, the two were often the same, since the Irish have excelled at acting. (There are curious parallels between the story of Synge's *Playboy of the*

Western World and O'Neill's own story.) And this heritage of the theatre helps to explain, psychologically, the mingling of actual autobiography with fictional tragedy throughout O'Neill's life. To the Irish immigrant's uncertainty as to his nationality was added the actor's uncertainty as to his true identity. James O'Neill became, in a sense, the Count of Monte Cristo ; and his sons called him the Beautiful Voice. In identifying himself with his actor's role, had James 'lost his true self forever ?' And what, exactly, was the 'true self' of an Irish immigrant actor—or of his son ? Eugene would spend his lifetime seeking.

"Beyond the psychological effect of his theatrical heritage, the practical effect of his father's way of life loomed even greater. The homelessness of which Mary Tyrone complained in 1912 had been caused not by James's parsimony but by the practical necessities of an actor's life. And this homelessness 'caused' the tragedy of the son as well as the tragedy of the mother.

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"But beyond the physical and the psychological homelessness caused by his Irish immigrant ancestry and his theatrical heritage, a deeper feeling of spiritual rootlessness resulted from his early experiences with Catholicism. The Catholic boarding school to which the young boy was sent inevitably became associated with his feelings of 'betrayal' by his parents. And this natural association was not dispelled (as ideally it might have been) by the administration of the school. For Mount Saint Vincent emphasized formal discipline and regulation rather than the homelike warmth which the lonely child needed. In later years he recalled chiefly the black robes and the white starched collars of the nuns. And he progressively associated their lack of emotional warmth with the Catholic religion. After five years at this boarding school and after two more at a Catholic day school, he finally rebelled against his Catholic heritage. At fourteen he was sent away to Betts Academy—a non-sectarian preparatory school in Connecticut.

"Thus the one element of his heritage which might have provided him with a spiritual 'home' failed him. Throughout

his life he was to wrestle with the problem of religious faith, and once, in *Days Without End*, he seemed to be returning to the Church. But from earliest childhood his life had been set in the pattern of homelessness by his parents, and Catholicism never provided a foster home. The final dramas of his later years describe his confrontation and acceptance of this tragic lot.

"And yet the very elements of his heritage which most caused his personal tragedy, and set him most apart from the American society about him, paradoxically made his tragedy most American. For the typically 'American' experience—as contrasted with the typical experience of the old world—has always been characterized by insecurity and homelessness, isolation, and often alienation. The Irish immigration which introduced the O'Neills to an alien land, the migratory profession which necessitated his family's homelessness, and his own consequent alienation from the religious faith which had sustained his parents—all were typically American. His own tragic agony and the imaginative dramas which he produced merely realized and greatly intensified the elements of tragedy inherent in the American experience from the beginning."[a]

Paper V : (AMERICAN LITERATURE)

1. Ernest Hemingway : A Farewell to Arms.
2. Arthur Miller ; Death of a Salesman.
3. Eugene O'Neill : (Mourning Becomes Electra) Homecoming.
4. Robert Frost : Birches; The Road Not Taken; An Old Man's Winter Night; Desert Places; After Apple Picking ; Mending. Walls.
5. Wallace Stevens : Domination of Black; The Emperor of Ice-Cream; The Idea of Order at Key West : Peter Quince at the Clavier; of Modern poetry : Study of Two Pears.

38 Long Day's Journey into Night : Personal Vision

Long Day's Journey into Night was O'Neill's remarkable effort of 1940 and it has been hailed as his raison d'e tre as an artist. It is a singular contribution to the field of American drama and it marks the culmination of O'Neill's development, psychological as well as artistic. The chief merit of this work lies in its artistic beauty and formal perfection.

L.D.N. is divided into four acts and each act adds to our understanding of the "inside" story of the Tyrones' household. *Act-I* introduces all the members of the family who suffer from natural ill-will and distrust. It coincides with the arrival of Mary Tyrone, who has just returned after being diagnosed for drug-addiction in a sanatorium. All the members heave a sigh of relief to see her back quite hale and hearty. They feel she is cured and is out of danger. They compliment her for this unbelievable recovery and there is a touch of emotionalism in their manner of welcoming her. James Tyrone Sr. shows his happiness by profusely kissing her and praising her bewitching eyes. All feel that she is transformed and will not touch morphine anymore because of her bitter experience of having consumed it in the past.

Edmund's rapidly deteriorating health is another source of anxiety in Act I. Being a consumptive, he is faced with a life-and-death struggle in his life. Although Edmund is a victim of T.B. and his end is near, yet his father, James Tyrone, is not convinced and he would like to ascertain from the family quack, Dr. Hardy, whether his son suffers from this fell disease or not. He rejects the suggestion of the members of his family that the case should be referred to a specialist. He goes out of the way to justify his choice of Dr. Hardy and his competence to deal with this ailment. He curses his son, James Tyrone Jr., who has been ridiculing his idea of sending Edmund to such a cheap and incompetent "doctor" who plays havoc with human life in order to collect money. Finding himself trapped, James blames his son for his repeated failures at the acting jobs which he had been offering him from time to time.

Act I of *L.D.N.* ends on a discouraging and pessimistic note. There is a sudden change of mood from hope into despair. It is confirmed beyond doubt that Mary is still a victim of her past

affliction and has not given up her habit of consuming drugs in the absence of others. Edmund, who is her favourite and a little in "love" with her, cautions her to be more particular about her delicate health. He requests her not to take morphine and kill herself in this unnatural manner. Mary is not happy the way she is being shadowed by others. She tells them that it is becoming increasingly difficult for her to be at home in this atmosphere of awe and disbelief.

Act II of *L.D.N.* brings more facts about the life of the Tyrones to limelight. Mary's addiction is causing a lot of anxiety and all are worried about her declining health. James Tyrone, Jr., is critical of her weakness for drugs and concludes that she is past cure and can never listen to reason and consequently mend her ways. He realizes that he had misjudged her true character in the past and was wrong to conclude that she could shake off her illusions. It is finally decided in one voice to accept her with all her faults and not to press her anymore for giving up morphine.

The relationship between the past and the present is clearly brought out in Act II and it shows how the present is being constantly governed and conditioned by the past. Unable to find solace in the present, Mary goes backward in time to discover peace and security. Mary seems to have lost all hopes in the present and leans too heavily on the past for her survival. She is often reminded of her thrilling convent times when she was at perfect ease and her mind was free of all tensions. She cannot forget the life and death struggle through which she had to pass while giving birth to Edmund and the negligence of the quack, Dr. Hardy, who prescribed over doses of morphine to kill her pain and thus left her a permanent drug-addict. Mary blames herself for causing the death of Eugene due to her sheer negligence and indifference. She also realizes that she has been a liar throughout her life and has been false not only to others but also to herself.

The end of Act II sees Mary in a state of confusion. She is still not clear about the exact cause of her alienation. When everyone has left her, she admits that "their contempt and disgust are not pleasant company". She feels quite confident of overcoming her loneliness. But soon her confidence is shattered and she suffers from greater loneliness. With a despairing laugh, she enquires : "Then Mother of God, why do I feel so lonely ?"

Act III finds Mary going deeper and deeper into her past and marks her gradual disillusionment with the present. Now she has

come to look at the past as the only reality that exists for her. The period that she has come to visualize is the period before and after her marriage with James Tyrone. Mary finds herself being transported back to her ecstatic past. She is happy to recall those wonderful days when she was courted by the handsome young James Tyrone. She is clearly revisiting the time of her wedding when she looked so attractive in her wedding gown.

Mary's image of James Tyrone is totally changed with the passage of time. She is no more his blind admirer. She has found the real nature of the man soon after her marriage and thus begins to withdraw from him. She can hardly bear the way he looks down upon her. She finds that he is mean and is no better then his sons. She is not happy the way he behaves with her and particularly she cannot tolerate his fault-finding nature. James Tyrone has also drawn his own conclusions about her true nature. He is convinced that no one can soften her rigid nature, including himself. He is equally sure that Mary can never mend her bad ways and stop taking morphine secretly and give up illusions.

Edmund's serious nature of his ailment is confirmed in Act III and he is advised to go to some sanatorium for rest and diagnosis. Mary is still not satisfied with this news and she feels that some incompetent person has been consulted who has misguided them. Still she feels that the cause of Edmund's steady fever may have a different origin, requiring an altogether different remedy.

The antagonism between James Tyrone and Edmund reaches its climax in Act IV. It is quite clear that they do not see eye to eye with each other. They openly criticize and find fault with each other. James parsimoniously warns him to douse the lights when he enters, and Edmund calls him a cheap skate. He criticizes him for preferring Downson and Baudelaire to Shakespeare and showing lack of literary taste and insight. Edmund blames him for destroying the Tyrone family. He chides him for hiring the services of a quack who prescribed drugs to subside Mary's labour pains and made her a permanent drug-addict. But this was strongly refuted by James Tyrone who pleaded his total ignorance in this case. His contention is that the Hilltown Sanatorium, though state-supported and therefore inexpensive, is the best place available for him. Reacting sharply to the charge of miserliness, James Tyrone defends his spending on the ground that he has seen very bad days in his life and knows the value of money. Edmund is deeply impressed by the forceful defence of his father. He praises his father the way he

has been supporting his family without caring for his personal comforts. Now he feels guilty of ill-treating his father and humiliating him in public. Edmund has, now, realized the position of his father and says, "I'm glad you've told me this, Pape. I know you better now."

James Tyrone, Jr., confesses in the end that he has never liked Edmund and has been jealous of him throughout his life. In a burst of drunken self-revelation, he confesses that he has been the sub-conscious cause of Edmund's consumption. He also takes all the blame on himself for having always sought to kill the life-giving illusions of Edmund. In the end, he warns him that he should be cautious about him and not to follow him blindly.

Act IV shows Mary's special fascination for the past and her unhappiness about the present. She dreams about the period before her marriage. She is seen wearing a sky-blue dressing gown over the night-dress and carrying her wedding gown on her arm. She finds herself facing her sister Therese and is seen talking to her. All listen to her nightmare idyll in amazement, but for her they are non-existent. She becomes so much engrossed in her vision that she seems to be totally forgetf-l of the immediate present. At this stage she is completely merged with her past. The story reaches its climax with the vibrant lines, "Yes, I remember, I fell in love with James Tyrone and was so happy for a time."

Long Day's Journey Into Night has no plot in the conventional sense of the term. The slow turning of memory is the play's only action. Mary Tyrone is mostly seen in a mood of reminiscence and regresses from the present to the past. For Edward, the play has been "a play of discovery like Oedipus". The main action of the play moves between the present and the past and vice versa. It shows that the reaches of time into past are infinite. In the words of Prof. Tiusanen : "It is within the speeches that a major part of the drama is acted." Mary remembers more and more about things as they used to be. She goes back to the times when her children were young. In every case, the past had a potentiality which the present is totally devoid of. Thus a great backward reach into the past is revealed within a slight backward movement. A few hours of time shown upon the stage are made to enclose many years of past time. As Nicola Chiaromonte observes : "The action lasts for one day, but it might have lasted for a century. It lasts in fact as long as the torments of hell." The long psychic duration is made possible by the artistic merging of the three temporal rhythms

into one : "The past is the present, isn't it ? It's the future, too." Paradoxically, the past becomes the only reality for these characters, while present is all an illusion.

Long Day's Journey Into Night is a well-knit work of art and is rightly praised for its meticulous design. It is dramatically one of the tightest of O'Neill's plays and there is nothing loose or rambling about it. The play is noted for its sheer power and concentration. It combines documentary study with controlled art. Another source of unity is the Tyrone family which is the central situation in the play. The characters act upon one another, changing themselves as they change the others.

L.D.N. is the most unconventional play in its utilization of time-scheme and it follows one compact period of time. O'Neill has telescoped the events of months into a single day. The play is the recalling of a day in the O'Neill's household. The action begins arbitrarily at 8·30 a.m. and ends after midnight. Act I begins in the forenoon. The Sun is yet morning-soft when the Tyrone family finishes its breakfast. Act II occurs at lunch time and marks the arrival of fog. Act III starts in late afternoon and the fog has thickened everywhere. Act IV starts at midnight and a wall of fog stands thick against the window panes.

The title of *L.D.N.* is very suggestive. Every character in the drama is a journeyer. The word "journey" has a number of meanings and implications. For Mary, it is not a journey forward but in the backward direction. It takes her from a world of reality into a world of illusions or dreams. Mary undertakes this journey because she has no hope in the present which has no comparison with her happy and carefree past. She moves into the past for regaining her will-power, lost vitality, and self-confidence. For Jamie, this "journey" will lead him nowhere. He is sure that it offers no hope or promise and will only deepen his crisis. For Jamie, it will begin and end in darkness, offering him nothing to sooth his agitated mind. Clearly such a journey is sure to add to his cynicism and despair in life. For James Tyrone, Jr., it is a journey from commercial successes to financial failures. He feels that his journey has no specific destination and it is a journey down the wrong road without any luck. For Edmund, it is a journey from darkness into light, from confusion into clarity, and from despair into hope.

Long Day's Journey into Night is also known for its symbolism which increases its intellectual impact. "Home" is the main symbol around which the entire tragedy is enacted. It is a home, but every-

one feels homeless here. It is no place for man's physical and spiritual shelter. It repels rather than attracts its inhabitants. The 'house' is not a symbol of hope but one of deep despair. It reminds one of death and not of life. Although it is ironically called the "summer" house, yet there is no sign of summer or sunshine in it. Instead of "summer" we have ever-present "winter" with no possibility of any future seasonal change in it. It is not life but death which is clearly seen reflected from it. For Mary, the "summer" house is a barren place and it stands for emptiness of life. At the most it can be a summer resort, not a home. The summer has failed to sooth Mary's disturbed mind. She never finds herself an integral part of it. She is never 'here' but 'there' which belongs to her past before her marriage and particularly the days spent in her parental house with all the comforts of life, companionship, and mutual trust.

The symbols of 'fog' and 'foghorn' are employed with a telling effect in the play. "Fog" is a profouud, brooding, and steadily deepening curtain or screen for dramatizing the tragedy of the Tyrone family. It is a physical testimony to their isolation. It is a potential symbol of man's ignorance about himself and his failures to understand others in this fog-ridden world. It also stands for oblivion and self-deception The persistent use of "fog" is made to objectify the progress of escapism in the characters. The "foghorn" is the eerie companion of the "fog" and it is frequently heard in the closing phases of the play. It is a desolate sound of aloneness. It is the most lonely and mournful of man-made sounds. The "foghorn" suggests that the characters' contact with the world of reality may be very thin, yet it is never completely broken. It is a leitmotif of the family fate and it becomes audible whenever the fate asserts itself.

The characters in *L.D N.* are symbolic, yet they are not lifeless. They are full of life and are highly individualized. James Tyrone, Jr., stands for the forces of materialization and commercialization of art. He attaches more importance to art than life and this tendency is clearly reflected in his treatment of the members of his family. Mary Tyrone is a symbol of man's lostness in this world. She symbolizes the world of illusions and pipe-dreams only and is quite oblivious of the world of reality from which she has totally dissociated herself for ever. In her quest for happiness, she has lost not only her faith but also her home. James Tyrone, Jr., symbolizes the potent forces of dissolution and death, of cynicism and despair.

of drunkenness and decadence. He stands for all that makes life so miserable and repulsive. He is also a symbol of negation and destruction and therefore anti-life. Edmund stands for the mystical affirmation of life. Although he is bed-ridden and is face-to-face with death, yet he has not given up hope in life and even sees good times ahead.

L D.N. is an honest and moving play, full of intimate biographical material. O'Neill has displayed unique courage in revealing his personal and private life in it. It is, observes Carpenter, "faithful not only to the letter but to the spirit of its autobiographical materials". The dramatist almost makes no attempt at disguising its autobiographical content. O'Neill does not sentimentalize or moralize in this play. It really goes to his credit that he has turned autobiography into drama with sufficient objectivity. As Bogard aptly opines : "It was a moment for truth and he told it." O'Neill has committed himself to see himself unmasked and clear. O'Neill calls it a play "of old sorrows, written in tears and blood." It is torn in agonised honesty from the memory and conscience of its author. The play is the central document of his dramatic career. The story is narrated from the depths of his own consciousness.

O'Neill's personal life is faithfully presented in *L.D.N.* Edmund Tyrone is the pseudonym for O'Neill and is modelled on his own life. He is also sick and sensitive like O'Neill. Both are the victims of consumption and are face-to-face with death everyday. Like Edmund, O'Neill has also suffered a lot under his father's penuriousness. Each tries to interpret life from a very personal angle. Edmund is an embittered adolescent like O'Neill. Each suffers from the feeling of being unwanted in his very domestic circle.

L.D.N. is O'Neill's family testament and it recreates the tortured secrets of his house-hold. As Carpenter informs us : "The story of Edmund Tyrone and his family is essentially the story of the young O'Neill". The play is the portrayal of the Tyrone family—the mother's addiction, the father's avarice, Jamie's alcoholism, and Edmund's tuberculosis. It brings to the surface the emotional difficulties which are faced by every member of the family. The play develops their characters and relationships dramatically and realistically.

The history of the Tyrone family runs parallel to that of O'Neill's family. The family names in *L.D.N.* are taken from life except for those of Eugene and the members of his family. The surname becomes Tyrone and some names are only partially changed

or modified. O'Neill's father and his elder brother retain their first names. James or Jamie is Eugene's elder brother. James closely corresponds to the actual James, Eugene's father. Like Edmund's father, O'Neill's father had also been a reputed actor of his times. Both were the sons of Irish immigrants. Each faced many ups and downs in his life. Like James O'Neill, James Tyrone too was forced to undertake hard work as a boy. James Tyrone is a successful star-actor of a romantic drama as was the real James O'Neill. But O'Neill's mother is assigned a fictitious name in the play. His mother, Ella Quinlan O'Neill, becomes Mary Cavan Tyrone in it. Edmund's mother has a striking resemblance to O'Neill's mother. Both live in the world of dreams and in their glorious past. They are drug-addicts. They suffer from a sense of alienation and remain uprooted in their lives. They suffer endless tortures after their marriages and "pine for what is not." Edmund, like O'Neill's elder brother, is a cynical sort and a dissolute drunkard. They carry a sense of guilt for having ruined the lives of their younger brothers out of sheer jealousy for them. Both indulge in sex, thinking it to be an act of self-punishment.

L.D.N. does not deal with blind facts only and no conscious attempt has been made to pack it with everything. As all memory is selective, O'Neill has dealt with the most important events of his life or of his family only. "All memory is selective," says Frenz, "especially when the events it recalls are occurring in the mind of an experienced dramatist and seeking appropriate expression." The play should be judged as a work of art and not in terms of biographical accuracies or inaccuracies. As G.H. Redford observes : "It would be better to regard the materials as irrelevant than to judge the play in terms of how closely the materials conform to the materials but their use should be the criteria." The play is faithful not to the letter but to the spirit of its autobiographical materials. It has taken more than artistic creativity to write this monumental work.

L.D.N. is the tragedy of the Tyrone family in particular and modern life in general. It is, in fact, a tragedy of cosmic dimensions and it concerns everyone, irrespective of race or nationality. The play is pervaded by the dark, brooding atmosphere of tragedy and a vague terror underlies it. The characters are caught in a "web" of misery and frustration and are made to feel the futility of this existence. *L.D.N.* is a heart-rending, harrowing study of an embittered family, marked by daily bickerings, misunderstandings, and ill-will. "It is distillation of sorrow, pure, beyond tears," observes

Prof. Bogard, "but it is also agony". No drama of modern times contains more of pain's substance than this play.

The tragedy of the Tyrone family is the outcome of multiple causes. The family is ridden with internal rifts and mutual bickerings. The clash between the father and the sons poses an ever-present threat to the unity of the family and has produced many minor crises in it. Death and disease continue to haunt the minds of the characters and all wait patiently for their end. Edmund suffers from T.B. and his end is a foregone conclusion. Jamie is a wastrel and alcoholic and Mary is a dope-fiend. The characters suffer from a feeling of intense alienation and there is no meaningful dialogue among them. James Tyrone's failure to provide a fixed home to his family has further aggravated the disintegration of the family and a feeling of anxiety colours their already gloomy faces. The tragedy of the family is also motivated by James Tyrone's miserliness.

The tragedy of the Tyrones is self-created and no one blames any external natural agency for their present crisis. All the Tyrones are doomed to destroy and be destroyed in the process. They are neither here, nor there, nor anywhere else. They are victims not only of the present but also of the past which has willed them a heritage of disease, alcoholism and drug-addiction and further cursed them with the deeper ills of alienation, conflict, and self-destruction.

The struggle in which the characters are involved shows that they are not willing victims of death and they do possess tragic dignity. All accept this challenge and try to overcome this life-and-death struggle in a very dignified manner. Mary fights against James Tyrone for a decent and peaceful living. The sons fight with their father against his tyranical nature, drawing his attention to the immediate requirements of the family and would not permit him to do any at its cost. The struggle in *L.D.N.* can also be internal. Each character is self-lost and is in struggle with itself. Mary is pretty sure of her regaining her lost faith and confidence. James Tyrone is still struggling day and night to be at the top in the world of theatre. Jamie's struggle is with himself. He has been punishing himself by taking wine and indulging in sex. He also faces another conflict in his mind. He is deeply prejudiced against his younger brother and wants to remove him from his path. Edmund's dilemma is that he cannot compromise with his mother and the way she is bringing an end to her life.

L.D.N. does not end on an extremely pessimistic note and it is wrong to assume that it leaves absolutely no hope for the modern man. It comes to an end on a hopeful affirmation ; it shows that man is still capable of establishing a meaningful dialogue in this world. There is an acceptance of life, including death. Edmund's tragedy is not one of defeat, but his is a tragedy leading to a better understanding of his present situation. His struggle ends on an optimistic note and has not gone unrewarded. He gains a far better understanding of his father and brother whom he had always looked upon as his critics and enemies in the past.

L.D.N. deals with the interaction of illusion and reality in life. Here the characters live on two planes of existence and can slip back and forth without encountering any great hurdle. On the plane of reality, life is coloured by despair and frustration and the characters are faced with the problem of alienation. The Tyrones have tasted the bitter fruit of what may be dubbed as a hopeless existence. They appear completely uprooted and disenchanted with their lives. The plane of illusion is just the opposite of the plane of reality. If the plane of reality repels, the plane of illusion draws people toward it. The plane of illusion attracts those who are fed up with the harsh realities of life. It has a special fascination for the pipe-dreamers and the illusionists. The Tyrones cling to their illusions which take them to their past times. They consume drugs to make this journey possible.

The characters in *L.D.N.* exist on two planes of reality. Mary Tyrone's mind is conflict-ridden and it oscillates between the present and the past. But for her, past is the only reality and the real reality has no meaning for her. Mary finds their role reversed in her life. She is basically a product of the past and has no existence apart from it. She, often, regresses from the world of reality to the world fog-bound world of dope and dreams. She will not accept the idea that someone should be sent to bring Edmund's T.B. test report, because that would force her to face the reality about his serious ailment. She has taken to narcotics with excuses of her son's illness. She has no substitute for her drug-induced dreams, her love-isolation. Unlike Mary, James is a realist who does not live in the world of dreams. He thinks less about the past but more about the immediate present with all its stresses and strains and this reveals his eagerness to make some adjustments with it. Money is the only reality for him and he can make

any sacrifice to possess it. Actually James has sold his soul to the illusion of success. He justifies his penury as wise and considerate, and then harks back to his poverty stricken childhood. He has all along been living a life of self-justification. There is sickness in Jamie's obsession with truth. His illusion is that his mother can help him in overcoming his dope-addiction. He also thinks that if his mother can win her battle with dope. then, he too cannot lag behind in getting rid of it with alcohol. For Edmund, the commitment to the sanatorium will provide a release from the family furies and ultimately a "journey into light". Unlike other Tyrones, he has no illusions about himself and is therefore prepared to face any eventuality, including death.

Studies in American Literature :

1. *Robert Frost* :	The Pasture, Revelation, The Tuft of Flowers, After Apple-Picking. Mending Wall, The Road not Taken, An old man's winter night, Birches, Fire and Ice. Stopping by Woods. Two look at two. Once by the Pacific. West-running Brook ; The Bear ; Two tramps, in Mud-time ; The on set, Desert Places. The most of it.
2. *Ezra Pound* :	Sestine ; Al taforte ; Ballad of the Goodly, Fere ; A Girl ; Doria ; The Lake Isle : The Return ; Salutation, Dance Figure ; In a Station of the Metro ; The River Merchant's Wife , An Immortality ; Huge Selwyn Mauberley ; Envoi ; Canto I.
3. *Ernest Homingway* :	A Farewell to Arms ;
4. *William Faulkner* :	The Sound and the Fury.
5. *Eugene O'Neil* :	Long Day's Journey into Night.
6. *Arthur Miller* :	Death of a Salesman.